NATION

Ex-help used spare key to enter house and rape

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Warner Bros approves Paramount's $ 81B deal

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

RCB, GT eye batting revival in their IPL match

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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At 91.78% & 85%, WB and TN see 'highest voter turnout since Independence'

Leaders beaten up in violent WB polls

A BJP candidate was assaulted in Kumarganj; MLA's car attacked; Cong-TMC workers clash

KOLKATA, 23 APRIL

Sporadic violence, clashes and allegations of voter intimidation marked the first phase of West Bengal Assembly elections on Thursday, even as the state recorded a historic voter turnout of 91.78 per cent across 152 constituencies.

Polling, held in 16 districts under tight security, saw long queues at booths. The high-stakes contest, primarily between TMC and BJP, unfolded amid the shadow of SIR of electoral rolls, which reduced the electorate by 12 per cent.

BJP candidate Suvendu Sarkar was assaulted in Dakshin Dinajpur's Kumarganj while heading to a polling booth after receiving reports of disturbances near the centre. According to party leaders, Sarkar was surrounded by a group of men, beaten and forced to flee across a field with only lone security personnel for cover. He later alleged the absence of central forces at the time of the attack and claimed he was targeted.

BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul's car was also attacked in Asansol Dakshin, where stones were hurled at her vehicle, shattering the windowpanes. The BJP termed the incidents "targeted violence", while the TMC rejected the allegations, accusing the opposition of attempting to engineer unrest.

Further clashes were reported in Murarai, where Congress and TMC workers clashed, leaving at least two injured. In Domkal, allegations surfaced that voters were prevented from reaching polling booths, with residents claiming they were threatened by armed groups. The Election Commission sought a report on the incident, and security was later intensified. Attacks on polling agents were reported from Birbhum's Labhpur and Malda's Chanchal. In Murshidabad's Naoda, crude bombs were allegedly hurled near a polling station overnight, leaving many injured. Police detained a TMC worker in a separate assault case Murshidabad.

EC said it received hundreds of complaints through official channels and the cVIGIL app, including allegations of EVM malfunction and misconduct by polling personnel. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 5

A security official stands guard as people wait in a queue to vote in West Bengal's Nandigram on Thursday; Kumarganj BJP candidate Suvendu Sarkar runs to safety with a security personnel as locals chase him —*PTI*

TN polls see traffic chaos, boycotts

Passengers allege shortage of buses, leaving many stranded for hours and unable to vote

CHENNAI, 23 APRIL

Tamil Nadu recorded a record voter turnout of 85.05 per cent on Thursday across 234 Assembly constituencies, in a keen three-cornered contest involving the DMK, AIADMK and actor-politician Vijay's TVK.

The elections were marred by severe traffic snarls and transport disruptions, particularly affecting thousands travelling from Chennai to their hometowns to vote. With a public holiday declared and a long weekend ahead, many residents began leaving the city from Wednesday night, exposing gaps in planning as commuters reported long delays, overcrowding and inadequate transport services.

Passengers alleged a shortage of buses, especially southern districts, leaving many stranded for hours. Social media was flooded with complaints from travellers stuck en route, unable to reach their destinations in time to vote. Officials said around 1.89 lakh people travelled using special bus services, with over 10,000 buses deployed statewide, though many termed the arrangements insufficient. Private omni bus operators were also accused of charging inflated fares.

At 6pm, when polling ended, 85.05 per cent of the 5.73 crore electorate, about 4.87 crore voters, had cast their ballots. The total votes polled stood at around 4.82 crore, about 23 lakh more than in 2021, when turnout was 73.63 per cent.

Karur recorded the highest turnout at 91.86 per cent, while Kanyakumari saw the lowest at 75.50 per cent.

There were scattered boycotts and minor clashes. Voters in Vengaivayal, Pudukottai, boycotted polling over a long-pending water contamination issue. In Nanguneri and parts of Thoothukudi, protests over local disputes kept turnout negligible in some booths, including one where only five votes were cast out of nearly 1,000 electors. Isolated clashes between party agents were reported in Madurai, Tiruvannamalai and Salem. BJP leaders alleged malpractice, including distribution of money and attempts to influence voters, claims denied by DMK. — *Salar News*

Passengers crowd the Lalbagh SF Express to Chennai in the early hours at Bengaluru's KSR railway station on Thursday, as a heavy rush of voters travelled to Tamil Nadu to cast their votes. Voters display ink-marked fingers in In Nagercoil —*SALAR/ PTI*

TURNOUT FOR BYPOLLS BARAMATI: 56% | RAHURI: 58% | UMRETH: 59%

India extends airspace ban for Pak till 24 May

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

India has extended the airspace closure for Pakistan planes until 24 May, marking over a year of restrictions since the Pahalgam terror attack on 22 April, 2025. Since last April, both countries have extended each other's airspace closures. Pakistan extended the ban till 24 May on Tuesday. A NOTAM issued on Wednesday stated Indian airspace will not be available for Pakistan-registered aircraft or those operated by Pakistan airlines, including military flights. The ban is effective until 2359 hours (UTC) on 23 May, or 0530 hours (IST) on 24 May. Following the attack in Kashmir, India and Pakistan closed their airspaces, with India's ban in place since 30 April last year. —*PTI*

CBSE Class-10 2nd board exams to be held from 15-21 May

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

The CBSE has announced the schedule for the second board examinations for Class-10, to be held from 15 May to 21 May. The exams will commence with mathematics (standard and basic) on 15 May, followed by English (communicative) and English (language and literature) on 16 May. Science is scheduled for 18 May, and on 19 May, students will sit for Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bangla, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, and foreign languages, along with home science and vocational courses. Sanskrit, painting, IT, and AI papers are on 20 May, with social science on 21 May. The datesheet was issued by Sanyam Bhardwaj, a week after the first CBSE Class-10 results.—*PTI*

SC stays life term of Amit Jogi in NCP leader's murder

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the Chhattisgarh High Court verdict, which had handed down life imprisonment to Amit Jogi, son of former chief minister Ajit Jogi in the 2003 murder case of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ramavatar Jaggi.

Jaggi was shot dead in Raipur on 4, 2003, when Ajit was the chief minister of Chhattisgarh.

The Chhattisgarh High Court had convicted Jogi and directed him to surrender before jail authorities in three weeks to undergo life imprisonment in the case.

In 2007, a trial court held that the prosecution had successfully proved the charges against 28 accused. It, however, acquitted Amit, the president of the Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (J), founded by his late father.

The top court took note of the submissions of the counsels appearing for Jogi, while the counsels for the victim's family member, opposed the submission.

The court also issued a notice to the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) on the plea of Jogi.

The HC had reopened proceedings in the murder case last month following directions from the SC on an appeal by the CBI. —*PTI*

WHEN GOVT IGNORES SAFETY

A two-wheeler rider struggles after his scooter gets stuck in a waterlogged ditch dug by BWSSB in Bengaluru's Benson Town on Thursday. The rider fell into a rainwater-submerged trench, raising questions over the lack of barricades or warning signs, and serving as a stark reminder of how citizen safety is routinely ignored in the City's crumbling infrastructure —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

DON CALLS INDIA 'HELLHOLE'

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

United States President Donald Trump on Wednesday took to social media to amplify a political commentator's remarks on birthright citizenship that casually described India and China as "hellhole" countries.

However, hours later Trump changed his stand and praised India as a "great country", saying he has a "very good friend" leading it.

Meanwhile, reacting to Trump's derogatory remarks, the Ministry of External Affairs said it had "seen some reports" but declined further comment.

Earlier in a strongly worded letter on Truth Social, Trump referred to hiring practices in California's tech sector, alleging that jobs are dominated by individuals from India and China.

The letter centres on the ongoing debate around birthright citizenship in the US. It argues that the issue of birthright citizenship should not be decided by courts or lawyers, but instead be put to a national vote. Citing a social media poll, it claims that majority of the people would supp restricting the policy, while also expressing distrust in legal institutions handling the matter.

Trump accused the American Civil Liberties Union of backing policies that allegedly benefit illegal immigrants over US citizens. —*Agencies*

>>>More on Pages 6 & 7

US military to 'shoot and kill' Iran small boats

President Donald Trump said he has ordered the US military to "shoot and kill" small Iranian boats that deploy mines in Hormuz. Trump claimed that Iran's Navy had been destroyed, but these small boats were attempting to lay mines and choke the Strait, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil and gas once traversed through. The move comes a day after Trump said he was "indefinitely" extending the ceasefire and IRGC attacked three cargo ships. The IRGC accused them of violating Iran's blockade. Trump's post came after the US seized a tanker allegedly associated with the smuggling of Iranian oil. US forces boarded the Guinea-flagged oil tanker Majestic X in the Indian Ocean between Sri Lanka and Indonesia, roughly at the same location where they seized another ship a few days prior. —*PTI*

HC stays FIR against HM over Rs 500 bet remark

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

The Karnataka High Court on Thursday stayed a magisterial order directing the registration of an FIR against state Home Minister G Parameshwara and the Deputy Commissioner of Tumakuru district over their alleged involvement in a Rs 500 bet.

"The context in which the alleged offence is made out prima facie lacks mens rea (guilty mind)," Justice Sunil Dutt Yadav said while granting the stay.

During a recent state-level pre-university kabaddi tournament in Tumakuru, Dakshina Kannada defeated Vijayapura 36–26 in the boys' final.

After presenting the prize, Parameshwara jokingly remarked, "I lost Rs 500. I had placed a bet with the Deputy Commissioner that the Vijayapura team would win."

Based on a private complaint filed by HR Nagabhushan, the 42nd Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Court ordered the registration of an FIR against Parameshwara over the remark and directed the police to initiate a probe.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Parameshwara said, "It seems I cannot crack jokes." —*PTI*

RURAL AREAS SCORE HIGH

SSLC records historic 94% pass percentage

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

Karnataka recorded a "historic" 94.1 pass per cent during the results for SSLC (class 10) exams-1 of regular students on Thursday.

The results were an increase of 14.06 per cent compared to all 3 exams last year, which was 80.04 per cent.

The Secondary School Leaving Certificate exams were held between 18 March and 2 April, and the evaluation of answer scripts was held at 237 evaluation camps, which were completed on 16 April.

Rural students' pass percentage is higher than that of Urban students. There is a substantial increase in the pass percentage of rural students (94.80 per cent pass), surpassing that of urban students (93.2 per cent).

The digital mark cards are also available on DigiLocker for the first time.

Out of 7,75,999 registered regular fresh students, 7,70,209 appeared for exams, registering an attendance of 99.2 per cent. Girls also outperformed boys with a pass percentage of 96.18 compared to pass percentage was 91.94.

Karnataka usually holds three annual board exams for Class 10 students, and they can choose the best scores that will appear on their mark cards. However, given the high pass percentage, there will be no third exam this year, said Minister for School Education and Literacy, Madhu Bangarappa. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

SSLC top rank holder Dhanush Shreedhar celebrates with his parents at their Rajajinagar residence in Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

— PTI

BSY's 50 yrs in politics celebration set for 9 May

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

A mega event honouring BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa's five decades in politics will be held in Chitradurga on 9 May, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah set to felicitate him. State BJP President BY Vijayendra and Chitradurga MP Govind Karjol announced that lakhs of people are expected to attend. "Yediyurappa has fought for farmers, worked for the welfare of the downtrodden, and championed social justice," Karjol said. The celebration, named 'Yediyurappa Abhimanotsava', will include a welcoming event on 8 May. Over 10 lakh participants are anticipated, with invitations extended to pontiffs, former chief ministers, ministers, social activists, and the public. A bhumi puja will be performed on 26 April.—*PTI*

Three devotees injured by chariot during procession

BASAVAKALYAN, 23 APRIL

During the Mahatma Basaveshwara fair in Basavakalyan, Bidar district, a festive procession turned tragic when three devotees were seriously injured after being caught under the chariot wheel. The Rathotsava started at the Ther ground with thousands of devotees present. As the crowd pulled the chariot enthusiastically, a sudden stampede-like situation occurred, causing the chariot to move forward abruptly. Those holding the ropes lost balance, and three individuals fell under the massive wheel. Devotee Dhanraj lost both legs, and his condition is critical; Rishabh and Bheemashankar also sustained severe injuries. Authorities are investigating safety lapses, with allegations of inadequate crowd control and failure to maintain distance. —*SALAR NEWS*

Lokayukta nabs Bagalkot SI accepting bribe

BAGALKOT, 23 APRIL

Lokayukta police trapped a Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) and a constable from Kerur Police Station in Badami taluk, Bagalkot district, while allegedly accepting a Rs 2 lakh bribe on Wednesday evening. The accused, PSI Bhimappa Rabakavi and constable Santosh Biradar, demanded the bribe from Muttappa Naykar, threatening to implicate him in a gambling and illegal money-lending case, and sought money to drop charges and release his seized motorcycle. Naykar, unable to tolerate the harassment, lodged a complaint with Lokayukta police. Acting on recorded telephonic conversations, officials laid a trap; Naykar handed over Rs 1.7 lakh and nabbed them red-handed. —*SALAR NEWS*

JD(S) doesn't want people like Zameer anyway: HDK

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

Union Minister and JD(S) second-in-command HD Kumaraswamy dismissed reports that Congress' Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan would switch over to the JD(S). "Don't take it seriously. There is no need to take such a category of people for power in our party," he said on Thursday. The reports grew after the Congress took action against several legislators after the Davangere (South) bypolls. However, Kumaraswamy noted that the internal tensions was nothing new to the Congress. "For the last three years, the only political discussions have been going on about the post of Chief Minister," he said, adding that this was impacting minister's ability to perform their duties and fix problems such as "acute drinking water shortages" in several villages. -*AGENCIES*

Dakshina Kannada leads in SSLC results

Govt schools perform well with 16% increase in pass percentage

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

As the wait finally ended for lakhs of students, Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts emerged at the top of the SSLC results with 98.40 and 98.18 pass percentages, respectively, while Kalaburagi is last with an 85.06 pass percentage.

Other top performers include Hassan at 97.51 per cent, Mandya at 97.45 per cent and Sirsi at 97.21 per cent. Bengaluru Rural recorded 95.83 per cent, Bengaluru North 95.33 per cent and Bengaluru South 91.64 per cent. Mysuru posted 94.45 per cent while Tumakuru stood at 92.04 per cent.

Minister for School Education and Literacy, Madhu Bangarappa said seven students secured 625 out of 625 and emerged as State toppers, including a student from a government school in Athani taluk in Belagavi district.

Pointing out another noticeable improvement, he said, "66.5 per cent of students have achieved 60 per cent and above (distinction)."

He said, 1,532 students benefited from the reduction of the passing percentage from 35 per cent to 33 per cent.

Bangarappa said, "Though girls are number one, I want to congratulate boys as they have improved their performance; there is a 17.69 per cent increase in boys' performance compared to last year."

Government schools performed well this year. There is an increase of 16.8 in the pass percentage from last year. 2,393 government schools achieved 100 per cent results this year compared to 766 last year. Bangarappa said, "I'm happy to share that more than 50 per cent of government schools have secured 100 per cent results."

Bangarappa, in response to a question, said 1,425 students failed only in the third language this year. As per the High Court order, students have been awarded marks, not grades, for the third language papers this year. —*Salar News*

Minister for Higher and Primary Education Madhu Bangarappa during a presser on the SSLC results, in Bengaluru, on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

NUMBER OF STATE TOPPERS

625/625:	7 students
624:	21 students
623:	28 students
622:	74 students
621:	98 students
620:	150 students

Chikkodi govt school girl Prarthana tops SSLC exam

CHIKKODI, 23 APRIL

In an extraordinary academic feat, Prarthana Nagappa Biradar Patil has secured the first rank in this year's SSLC (Class 10) examinations, scoring a perfect 625 out of 625.

A student of the Government High School in Katageri village of Athani taluk, Prarthana's achievement stands out as a testament to dedication, discipline, and goal-oriented study. Her success has brought immense pride to her school, teachers, parents, and the Chikkodi educational district.

Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) Sitaram expressed delight over the accomplishment, stating that it is a matter of great pride that a student from a rural government school has emerged as the state topper. "Prarthana's achievement brought back the past glory to Chikkodi educational district that stood in first ten list in the result in past decade," Sitaram added.

Prarthana sharing her happiness, stated that that writing key notes helped her memorise the text. She said that she wants to join a Science course for PUC. —*Salar News*

Prarthana Nagappa Biradar Patil —

CANTEEN OWNER'S GIRL RANKS 3RD

The daughter of a small canteen owner has secured the third rank at the State level, bringing pride to her district.

Latika, daughter of Nagesh Mogera, a student of the well-known Marikamba Government High School in Sirsi, secured 623 out of 625 marks. She scored a perfect 125 in Kannada, and 100 out of 100 in English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, and Social Science. In Science, she secured 98 marks, missing a perfect score by just two marks, and ultimately settling for the third rank in the State. Latika's father, Nagesh Mogera, runs a modest eatery named "Sridevi Canteen" in Channapatna Bazaar in the city. Expressing pride in their daughter's accomplishment, her parents said, "She made it a habit to study each day's lessons on the same day. During her preparation, she remained focused and never got distracted by mobile phones or television." -*SALAR NEWS*

AILING GIRL SECURES 1ST CLASS MARKS

Kusuma, the girl who came in an ambulance to write her SSLC exams, has secured first class marks by scoring 374 marks out of 625. She secured B grade in Kannada, Hindi and Mathematics, while in other subjects she has secured C+ grades. Kusuma, a student of St Mary's High School in KGF, met with an accident in September and sustained grievous injuries on leg, thigh and hips. She then underwent major surgeries, and was even readmitted to the hospital in December after developing infections. Doctors at the Aster Hospital in Whitefield opined that she needed more surgeries. She secured permission from school authorities to continue her studies from home, and completed assignments with her mobile phone. When exams approached, she displayed grit and secured permission to write the finals. She went by ambulance to the hall at St Joseph's school, and wrote the tests with the help of a scribe. -*SALAR NEWS*

KOLAR BOY DROWNS AFTER PASSING

The joy of having passed his SSLC was short lived for a boy in Kolar district, who drowned in an open well hours after the results.

The deceased, Kiran, went for a swim with his friends in the afternoon in Sonnawadi village, roughly three kilometres from Mulbagal, sources said. As he didn't know how to swim, his friends first guided him with a hollow wooden log. After a few attempts, Kiran reportedly told his friends that he would swim on his own. He removed the log and jumped in, but did not reappear. After attempting to search for him for some time, the friends then alerted family elders, who eventually found him stuck in the steps of the well. By that time, he had lost his breath. Headmaster of the Mulbagal Government High School V Lakshmaiah remembered Kiran as a soft-spoken boy who showed a keen interest in learning. -*SALAR NEWS*

People protest against SIR, at Freedom Park, Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Won't allow SIR in K'taka: Citizens

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

Several dozens of citizens gathered in Freedom Park on Thursday to protest the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, and said that the people of Karnataka would not accept such a move.

In a statement after the protest, the Confederation of Progressive Organisations and Secular Parties of Karnataka said that "the SIR process has already taken away the voting rights of 65 million people across 13 states." It said the BJP used SIR to "capture" Bihar, and slammed the Opposition for going silent on its "vote chori" campaign after losing.

It noted that the Election Commission of India (ECI) is preparing to implement the 3rd phase of SIR in other states, including Karnataka.

But since there is no imminent election in Karnataka, there is no need for a "hurried" SIR, the Confederation added. It demanded that the process period be doubled from three months, and the appeal period also increased to six months.

Additionally, "Voter Assistance Centres" should be set up in all Gram Panchayats and wards.

Notably, they demanded that the process should include a state voter list, prepared by the State Election Commission, instead of relying solely on the Centre.

"Not a single rightful voter be removed," the statement added. —*Salar News*

BJP protests against Kharge's 'terrorist' remark about PM

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

The State BJP on Thursday protested in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Vidhana Soudha on Thursday, and demanded an apology from AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, for his "terrorist" remark against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The protest was led by State BJP President BY Vijayendra, Leaders of Opposition in the Assembly and Council R Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, and several other leaders.

"Several countries have conferred their highest civilian awards on our Prime Minister. No other PM of India has received awards on such a scale," Vijayendra told press. "(But) Kharge called him a terrorist. Not only the BJP, but the entire country condemns it."

Ashoka said the Kharge's statement reflects the Congress party's "degraded culture." He added that people had rejected Kharge, and after losing the Lok Sabha elections, he is now holding onto power in the Rajya Sabha.

"Kharge had ambitions to become the CM of Karnataka, but the Congress party did not support him. He is disillusioned and does not know what he is saying," Ashoka claimed.

He demanded that Kharge be removed as Congress President.

On Tuesday, Kharge accused Modi of "terrorising" political parties by misusing government machinery and central agencies. Kharge also clarified that he did not call the Prime Minister a "terrorist". —*PTI*

BJP leaders protest at Vidhana Soudha, on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

"I think the BJP has run out of issues. They've been caught in vote chori, they've been caught making a mockery of the EC and the Commissioner, and now the SIR also has been exposed. So I just think that it's an attention-deviating tactics by the BJP -Priyank Kharge, IT/BT Minister

"Notice aane do. (Let the notice come). We will reply to it in the evening. Our people will reply to it

-Mallikarjun Kharge, AICC President on notice from the ECI

MLC calls on graduates to register for Yuva Nidhi scheme

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

Congress MLC Dinesh Gooligowda called on graduates to register under the State government's Yuva Nidhi scheme, one of the Congress' five guarantees.

"The scheme has benefited many unemployed graduates, helping them cover minor expenses and search for jobs in distant cities," Gooligowda, who is also the State Vice Chairman of the Guarantee Schemes Implementation Authority said in a statement.

The scheme aims to provide monthly financial assistance to unemployed graduates and diploma holders who are residents of Karnataka and passed during the academic years from 2022 to 2026. The allowance is Rs 3,000 for graduates and Rs 1,500 for diploma holders.

Gooligowda stated that beneficiaries must submit a self-declaration between the 1st and 25th of every month, confirming that they are not self-employed, not working, or not pursuing higher education to receive the allowance.

He said that since the inception of the scheme, approximately Rs 950.57 crore has been disbursed to the accounts of youth through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Across the State, a total of 4,22,519 candidates have registered, the statement added. Eligible candidates can register online through the Seva Sindhu Portal or can contact their District Employment Exchange Centre. —*Salar News*

FOUND BY HOUSEKEEPING STAFF

Foetus found in toilet at Bengaluru Foxconn facility

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

An unidentified foetus was discovered in the women's restroom on the premises of Foxconn Hon Hai Technology in Devanahalli, Bengaluru. A case has been registered following a complaint filed by a company employee who noticed a blockage in the women's toilet.

According to police, the incident came to light at the A41 building of the tech facility located in Doddagollahalli village under Vishwanathapura Police Station limits.

On Tuesday night at approximately 9.15pm, a housekeeping staff member noticed a

blockage in the women's restroom during a routine housekeeping check and informed her supervisor, who then alerted a technician.

The technician, whose shift has just ended decided to wait and clear the blockage the following morning. Following which, a senior engineer in the security department, VS Krishnaraj filed the police complaint

"Upon inspection of the toilet, it was discovered that the blockage was actually a foetus. Immediately, the police were informed," the complainant said.

Based on the complaint, police registered a case under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The charges include Section 93, which addresses the criminal offense of concealing a birth by secretly disposing of a child's body and Section 103, which pertains to the statutory punishment for murder.

Police said an investigation is currently underway. —*PTI*

Woman drowns trying to save son

BELAGAVI, 23 APRIL

In a tragic incident, a woman lost her life while trying to save her drowning son in the Hiranyakeshi River, with efforts ongoing to locate him, officials said. The incident occurred on Tuesday night near Sankeshwar, and the police continued their search on Wednesday.

The woman has been identified as 27-year-old Laxmi Sudhakar Kutoli from Hanuman Nagar, Sankeshwar. Her son had gone swimming in the river and ventured into deeper waters, leading to his drowning. In an attempt to rescue him, Laxmi jumped into the river but was also swept away. The boy's body had not been recovered by Wednesday afternoon, and authorities are investigating the incident further. An investigation is on to locate the presumed dead son. —*ANI*

Two delivery workers held for harassing woman

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

- Two men on a two-wheeler allegedly harassed a woman walking along the road. It was captured on a passing car's dashcam, and then circulated on Instagram

Two men have been arrested for 'indecent behaviour' involving the harassment of a woman walking on a road near Kogilu Main Road, Maruthi Nagar in Bengaluru, said police on Thursday. A case has been registered at Yelahanka Police Station.

On Tuesday afternoon, two youths on a two-wheeler harassed a woman walking along the road. The incident, reportedly captured on a passing car's dashcam, was subsequently circulated on Instagram under an account named 'Namma Bengaluru, police said in a statement.

Using the two-wheeler's registration number from the video, police identified and issued notices to the accused. Both men complied, reporting to the police station on Thursday with the vehicle involved in the offence.

"They were taken into custody and, during interrogation, confessed to the indecent behaviour towards the woman," police said.

Both of the accused were employed as delivery boys for an online grocery firm in Avalahalli, situated adjacent to Yelahanka.

Further investigation is in currently ongoing, sources added. —*PTI*

Stones hurled at Humayun's convoy in protest

AJUP Chief Humayun accuses CM Mamata of 'purchasing' candidates, faces 'go back' slogans

KOLKATA, 23 APRIL

AJUP Chief Humayun Kabir came under attack and faced protests, stone-pelting and clashes during polling in Murshidabad's Naoda on Thursday, as tensions escalated between his supporters and workers of TMC.

Kabir, after casting his vote, was met with "go back" slogans when he visited a polling booth in Shibnagar.

Protesters surrounded his vehicle, branding him a "BJP agent", and the confrontation soon intensified. Stones were allegedly hurled at his convoy, triggering a flare-up and forcing security personnel to intervene.

Clashes broke out between AJUP and TMC supporters, with both sides accused of pelting stones and vandalising vehicles. Central forces resorted to a baton charge to disperse the mob and bring the situation under control.

Officials said tension had been building since morning, with the Election Commission seeking a report on the violence.

Kabir later staged a sit-in, accusing the TMC of voter intimidation and electoral malpractice.

He alleged that the ruling party had bribed several of his candidates to withdraw. "They have purchased 27 of our candidates for amounts ranging from Rs 9 lakh to Rs 30 lakh.

I started with 142 candidates and am now contesting in 115 seats," he claimed. He also accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of political manoeuvring and polarisation, alleging targeted outreach to religious groups.

In Nandigram, fresh tensions surfaced as the TMC accused police personnel of acting in favour of the BJP and lodged a formal complaint seeking the removal of two officers from poll duty.

Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari countered the charge, alleging that "TMC-sheltered criminals" were roaming freely and threatening voters, particularly near booths with a significant Hindu electorate.

He said he was visiting such booths to reassure voters and prevent intimidation.

Adhikari, who cast his vote earlier in the day, also praised the Election Commission and central forces for maintaining order, noting how the night before polling passed with no major disturbances. *—PTI*

A scuffle breaks out between TMC workers and AUJP founder Humayun Kabir in Murshidabad as he visits the area where a crude bomb hurling incident was reported a day earlier *—SCREENGRAB*

By the way, I have heard that jhalmuri has also given some people a strong jolt. Jhal Muri maine khaayi lekin jhal TMC ko lagi hai (I have eaten jhalmuri, but it is TMC that has felt the sting)

-Narendra Modi, PM

I am not interested in any post, I don't want the chair. I only want end of BJP government in Delhi...People voted in good numbers to protest the deletion of names in SIR

-Mamata Banerjee, Bengal CM

Election Commission: (West Bengal Election). Experiment in disenfranchisement. The CEC must be awarded with a Padam Bhushan. My question: Why have an election?

-Kapil Sibal, former law minister

EVM glitches disrupt polling

Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) glitches disrupted polling at several locations in West Bengal during the first phase of the Assembly elections on Thursday, officials said.

In Murshidabad district, voting was halted at booth 156 in Parsalika Ma dan mohan Primary School in the Bel danga segment after an EVM malfunction.

Polling was also delayed at booth 212 in Samsherganj and booth 130 in Kandi due to similar issues.

In Purba Medinipur, an EVM snag was reported in Birulia in the Nandigram constituency. In Cooch Behar, voting at booth 229 in Town High School was suspended for nearly an hour before resuming.

Polling was also delayed at booth 231 in Habibpur constituency of Malda district.

In Siliguri, Darjeeling district, voting at booth 26/31 in Margaret School could not begin on time due to a faulty EVM. *—PTI*

Villagers attack central forces

Villagers allegedly attacked central forces at a polling station in Bodhpur village under Khoyrasol block in the Dubrajpur Assembly constituency of West Bengal's Birbhum district on Thursday. The incident began with an argument between voters and police over a malfunctioning EVM. The situation escalated as locals resorted to stone-pelting at the central forces. Several personnel sustained serious injuries and were rushed to a local hospital for treatment, officials said.

Jumbo 'Ramlal' joins poll queue

An unexpected visitor briefly disrupted polling in West Bengal's Jhargram on Thursday, as a wandering elephant named 'Ramlal' ambled into a booth at Jitushol Primary School in the Jangalmahal region. Polling was momentarily halted as the tusker moved around the area. Forest officials from the Lodhashuli range quickly intervened and guided the animal away. Polling resumed shortly after, with officials noting that special teams had been deployed to handle such wildlife-related disruptions in the forested belt.

Despite record heat, TN votes in strong numbers

CHENNAI, 23 APRIL

Braving soaring temperatures and high humidity, voters across Tamil Nadu turned out in steady numbers on Thursday for the Assembly elections, underscoring a strong commitment to the democratic process.

Despite maximum temperatures rising 2–4°C more than usual this April, early turnout remained brisk as voters sought to beat the heat. In many areas, humidity made the 30°C morning feel closer to 39°C. Urban centres such as Chennai, Coimbatore and Madurai reported consistent participation.

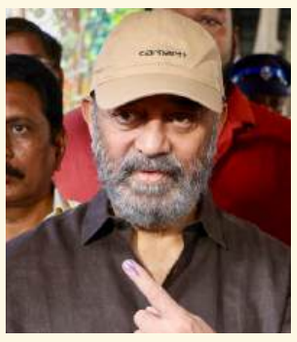
Voters from marginalised communities displayed notable resolve. In Karur, bead sellers and daily wage earners travelled long distances to polling stations. At Vettaikaran Pudur, Meena from the Narikurravar community stood in line with her child, saying continued voting was key to securing housing and education.

Authorities ensured shade, drinking water and cooler spaces at booths, while political campaigns were largely shifted to evenings to avoid peak heat between .

In Chennai, BJP members staged a dharna outside a polling station in the Mylapore constituency, alleging attempts by DMK workers trying to influence voters. *—PTI*

People queue up to vote in Tami Nadu's Nagercoil on Thursday *—PTI*

FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY



Politicians and celebrities turned out in large numbers to cast their votes, including Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK candidate MK Stalin in Kolathur, AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami in Salem, TVK Chief Vijay in Tiruchirappalli, BJP's Tamilisai Soundararajan in Saligramam, and actors Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan, Dhanush and Ajith in Chennai *—PTI*

Just 15 minutes after their wedding ceremony in Chennai, advocate Sunil and his bride headed straight to the polls in Kodambakkam. Still in their wedding attire. The couple said they were 'racing against time' to ensure that the bride can vote in her constituency Kallakurichi *—PTI*

A three-generation family of 14 arrived together to vote at Stella Maris College in Chennai. Spanning elderly members to first-time voters, the family said voting together was a shared tradition, with younger members encouraged by elders to take part in the democratic process *—PTI*

Two villages boycott election over 'pathway dispute'

TUTICORIN, 23 APRIL

Within the Vilathikulam constituency, villagers of Kulathuvaipatti and Kumaragiri in Ettayapuram have sworn off polling over a "pathway dispute". Villagers have long disputed access to a designated path leading to their farmland with residents of a nearby Sri Lankan refugee camp. Tensions escalated on 18 April, following various black flag protests and hunger strikes, resulting in a stone-pelting incident. Frustrated, villagers have decided to boycott the elections until "a solution is found". Officials at polling booth No 64 at the Panchayat Union Primary School on Thursday confirmed that of the 983 registered voters, only five votes had been cast by midday. Ettayapuram is famously the birth place of revolutionary poet Subramania Bharathi, fondly known as Bharathiyar. *— PTI*

EVM 'glitch' hits Erode, Namakkal

Voting was temporarily delayed in parts of Erode and Namakkal due to glitches in EVMs/VVPAT, officials said. In a polling booth in Erode's Soorampatti, a "minor technical glitch" in EVMs was rectified, officials confirmed. At a polling booth in the Kollimalai foothills of Namakkal, voting was briefly delayed due to a faulty EVM/VVPAT.

—ANI

Coal 'scam': I-PAC head gets 14-day judicial custody

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

A Delhi court on Thursday sent political consultancy firm I-PAC co-founder and director Vinesh Chandel to 14-day judicial custody in a money laundering case linked to an alleged coal scam in West Bengal. Additional Sessions Judge Deepti Devesh allowed the ED's plea seeking Chandel's judicial custody. He was produced after completion of his 10-day ED custody. On 14 April, the court had allowed the ED to quiz Chandel in its custody for 10 days, saying there are reasons to believe that he was involved in the generation, diversion and possession of proceeds of crime worth crores. —PTI

'SAMRAT HAS NITISH'S SUPPORT'

We let BJP take CM's post to reciprocate its support: JD(U)

PATNA, 23 APRIL

The JD(U) on Thursday said that after its president Nitish Kumar stepped down as chief minister and the party allowed the BJP to take the CM's post to reciprocate the "support" it received from it in the past.

The statement was made by senior JD(U) leader Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary at a press conference here.

"Tomorrow, the new government headed by Samrat Choudhary will seek a vote of confidence. A single-day session of the Assembly has been called for this. The NDA enjoys a thumping majority, so winning the trust vote is a foregone conclusion," Chaudhary said.

He said that it must be kept in mind that the new government is also backed by Nitish Kumar, who gave up the post as he took the decision to move to the Rajya Sabha.

BJP's Samrat Choudhary took over as CM after Nitish moved to RS *—ANI*

Earlier, state JD(U) president Umesh Kushwaha said at the press conference that Chaudhary intended to answer any questions related to the power transition in the state, which began with Nitish announcing his decision to contest Rajya Sabha polls a month ago.

After his election, Samrat Choudhary took over as the first BJP Bihar chief minister.

When Chaudhary was asked why the JD(U) did not press to keep with itself the CM's post after Nitish relinquished it, he replied: "The BJP is an old ally. It supported us in 2020 when our tally had crashed in the Assembly polls. So, it was decided that we reciprocate by supporting a government headed by them." *— PTI*

Didi used state force to block IPAC raid: ED

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

Alleging complete breakdown of law and order in West Bengal, the ED told the Supreme Court on Thursday that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee used the state machinery to block its probe against I-PAC regarding a Rs 2,700-crore coal smuggling case.

Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and NV Anjaria heard Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor General SV Raju on behalf of the ED and its official Robin Bansal and they sought a direction to the CBI to register an FIR and probe the case.

The court was hearing arguments on the ED's plea that alleged obstruction by Mamata and other WB authorities during its 8 January search of the Kolkata office of I-PAC.

The ED alleges that the chief minister, accompanied by a large police contingent, intervened to stop the search and seize evidence collected by ED officers.

The proceedings began with a

sharp exchange between the Solicitor General and senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy.

Menaka accused the ED of using the courtroom as a "social media weapon in a political campaign," labelling the SG's arguments as the behaviour of an "unelected crown." Responding to the submission that the plea of the ED was not maintainable, he said the petition under Article 32 was valid because the "rule of law" is an integral part of Article 14 (right to equality).

He said that when a chief minister takes the law into her own hands, the fundamental rights of the investigating officers, as citizens, are violated. The hearing will resume on 13 May. *—PTI*

BJP wants 'Pawar vs Pawar' duel in Baramati: Rohit

PUNE, 23 APRIL

NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar said on Thursday that nobody in Baramati wants to see a 'Pawar versus Pawar' battle there in the 2029 Assembly polls, but some people aligned with the NCP appear to favour such a contest as they want to finish the Pawar family's legacy.

He was apparently targeting the BJP.

The NCP is currently headed by Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, who took over the reins of the party after the death of her husband Ajit Pawar in a plane crash in January. Sunetra is in the fray as a Mahayuti candidate for the Baramati by-election.

On speculation over the possible battle between late Ajit Pawar's son Jay and his cousin Yugendra Pawar in Baramati in 2029, Rohit said, "A Pawar vs Pawar contest took place in the (last) Lok Sabha and Assembly polls against the wishes of the people of Baramati." *—PTI*

Man beheads wife, roams with her head in Korba

KORBA, 23 APRIL

A 58-year-old man allegedly beheaded his wife in Bundeli village and then wandered the village carrying her severed head, police said. The incident occurred on Wednesday evening under the Rajgamar police limits. The accused, Salik Ram Yadav, a poultry farm watchman, attacked his wife, aged 50, following a dispute while intoxicated. He then reportedly placed the head and weapon in a plastic sack before reaching the police outpost. He claimed the killing was due to frequent disputes and suspicions about his character. The couple had four children, and the body has been sent for post-mortem. The suspect has been arrested. —*PTI*

— PTI

Arrest Hindutva leader Khattar: Goa protesters

PANAJI, 23 APRIL

Over 100 people gathered in Vasco, Goa, calling for the immediate arrest of Gautam Khattar over alleged derogatory remarks against St Francis Xavier. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said efforts are underway to trace Khattar and prevent his escape. The Goa Crime Branch issued a Look Out Circular, alerting the Bureau of Immigration. Khattar, founder of Sanatan Mahasangh, made controversial remarks at an 18 April event, sparking protests. Around 150 protesters, including local leaders, demanded action against Khattar and questioned the event organisers. Police arrested his brother Madhav Khattar in Haridwar. Efforts are ongoing to locate Khattar, with police registering an FIR for hurting religious sentiments.—*PTI*

— ANI

Godman Kharat in judicial custody till 6 May

NASHIK, 23 APRIL

Nashik court has sent self-styled godman Ashok Kharat to judicial custody until 6 May in his fifth sexual assault case. Kharat was arrested on 18 March after a woman accused him of rape. He is also charged with exploiting multiple women and committing financial fraud, claiming divine powers. The police allege he sexually exploited a married woman seeking help. The Maharashtra SIT is investigating, with Kharat facing at least 12 cases. Court proceedings, held via video, saw the defence concede to police custody. The SIT will present him again on Friday in a sixth case involving alleged harassment. He remains a controversial figure due to political connections.—*PTI*

UP man axes daughter to death for not cooking

PRATAPGARH, 23 APRIL

Police said on Thursday that they arrested a man in Kohandaur village for allegedly killing his daughter with an axe after an argument about why she hadn't cooked dinner. SHO Dhananjay Rai said police arrested the suspect, Ram Lal, near his house in Gaura Atrasand village and recovered the axe and stick used in the crime. ASP (City) Prashant Raj Hooda said the police recovered the 30-year-old Sonam's body on Wednesday near their house. She had come to her parental home a day earlier. In a complaint, Sonam's husband Ajay Kumar alleged that his father-in-law killed her as he was drunk. Based on the complaint, police registered a case against Lal. —*PTI*

Ex-help used spare key to enter house and rape

He had raped another woman in Alwar 12 hours ago

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

The probe into the rape and murder of the 22-year-old daughter of a senior IRS in southeast Delhi's Kailash Hills locality on Wednesday revealed some chilling facts.

Police sources said the suspect, Rahul Meena, 19, headed straight to the rooftop study after sneaking into the house using a spare key, and attacked the woman who was preparing for civil services examination, raped her, and dragged her blood-soaked body downstairs.

Rahul, who was arrested from a hotel in Dwarka hours after the crime, did not show any remorse during interrogation. He had raped another woman in Alwar 12 hours ago.

At the IRS officer's house he allegedly hit the victim with a heavy object, rendering her unconscious and strangled her with a phone cable.

Rahul Meena, who was arrested from a hotel in Dwarka hours after the crime, did not show any remorse during interrogation —*ANI*

"The investigation indicates that the suspect raped the victim while she was unconscious. He then dragged her down the stairs to another room where a locker was kept, and attempted to open the biometric lock using her fingerprint, but it did not open," a police source said.

He then broke the locker open using a screwdriver, stole cash and jewellery, changed his blood-stained clothes and slippers and fled, around 30 minutes before the victims' parents returned.

The suspect, who worked as a domestic help in the house and was fired around a month ago, knew about the morning routine of the victim's parents, police said. Police sources said the suspect told them that he had gone to the house "to ask for money" and that the rape and murder "just happened." Rahul reportedly told the police, "If Didi had given the money, this would not have happened."

A Delhi court sent Rahul to four days police custody on Thursday. CJM Deepika Thakaran allowed the police's plea seeking four days of custodial interrogation of the suspect. — *PTI*

WOMEN AT SABARIMALA

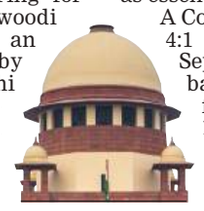
All views respected but not WhatsApp university's, says SC

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

The Supreme Court said it respects the views of all eminent authors and thinkers, but it cannot accept information from 'WhatsApp University'.

The observation by a nine-judge Constitution bench came on Thursday while it was hearing petitions about discrimination against women at places of worship, including the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

Senior advocate Neeraj Kishan Kaul, appearing for the head of the Dawoodi Bohras, referred to an article written by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, which talked about judicial restraint in matters of religious faith.



At this juncture, CJI Kant said, "We respect all eminent persons, jurists, etc., but personal opinion is personal opinion." Kaul said there was no harm in drawing from all sources. "Knowledge coming from any source, any country, any university, should be welcomed," Kaul said. Justice Nagarathna responded in a lighter vein, "But not from WhatsApp University." The court said on Wednesday that it was very difficult for a court to define the parameters to declare a particular religious practice as essential or non-essential.

A Constitution bench, by a 4:1 majority verdict in September 2018, lifted a ban that prevented females aged between 10 and 50 from entering the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple in Keralam. — *PTI*

Truck brakes fail, 11 killed in UP multi-vehicle crash

MIRZAPUR, 23 APRIL

Eleven people, including children, were killed in a multi-vehicle collision triggered by a suspected brake failure in a truck in Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur district, police said on Thursday.

The accident was reported at around 8.30 pm on Wednesday, following which the police and the fire brigade rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation with the help of locals, SP Aparna Rajat Kaushik said.

Police said the collision occurred on NH-135 descending from the Dramandganj valley towards Lasoda, about 50 km from district headquarters.

The truck travelling downhill is suspected to have suffered a brake failure and rammed into another truck moving ahead of it.

A car travelling between the two trucks was crushed in the impact. In the chain collision that followed, another car caught fire after being hit, Kaushik said. "Police and locals pulled out the victims trapped in the mangled vehicles. So far, 11 deaths have been reported," the SP said.

District Magistrate Gangwar said that 7 of those killed were from Mirzapur district, three from MP, while one was from Sonbhadra district —*ANI*

District Magistrate Pawan Gangwar said that seven of those killed were from Mirzapur district, three from Madhya Pradesh, while one was from Sonbhadra district.

The vehicles involved in the crash are a truck bearing a Bihar registration number and another registered in Madhya Pradesh. Among the cars, one was from Sonbhadra district and the other from Mirzapur. — *PTI*

POORAM ON 26 APRIL

Thrissur blast: Probe on to detect chemicals used

THRISSUR, 23 APRIL

Two days after the blast at a fireworks manufacturing unit at Mundathicode here claimed 14 lives, a police forensic team is examining what chemicals were being used to make the crackers and whether any of them were prohibited.

A forensic official on Thursday said samples were being collected from the blast site and after testing of the materials it can be determined what chemicals were being used. The test report would be handed over to the jurisdictional court and the investigation officer to carry out a probe, he said.

The official said that in view of the seriousness of the matter, the entire forensic team, of around 14 members, has been deputed for taking samples and testing them. Therefore, the results would be available quickly, he said.

The Kerala government decided to appoint a single-member judicial commission, comprising former Kerala High Court judge Justice CN Ramachandran Nair, to probe the incident.

Meanwhile, the police on Thursday carried out a final search at the explosion site.

Thrissur City Police Commissioner Nakul Rajendra Deshmukh said around 10 phones have been recovered and will be sent for forensic analysis.

Meanwhile, in Palakkad the Revenue Department searched a firework manufacturing facility at Muthalamada here, operating for the Thrissur Pooram and found explosives stocked beyond the permitted limit. Kollengode police registered a case against the unit's licence holder, Binoy Jacob, who had secured the fireworks contract for Paramekavu Devaswom. — PTI

Telangana RTC strike continues, public faces problems

HYDERABAD, 23 APRIL

The indefinite strike by Telangana State RTC employees entered its second day on Thursday, forcing passengers to depend on private transport and causing widespread inconvenience. Employees protested at several locations backing 32 demands, including the merger of the RTC with the government.

The corporation operated limited private and electric buses, but passengers faced long waits and alleged overcharging by autos. Only 25–30 per cent of services ran, affecting nearly 65 lakh daily commuters.

Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar urged staff to end the strike, alleging political motives.

He said the government agrees to most demands but needs time on key issues. Talks had failed earlier, with officials seeking four weeks to respond citing financial implications involved. —*PTI*

Kedarnath pilgrim dies, kin pays Rs 65K for chopper

HYDERABAD, 23 APRIL

A 69-year-old pilgrim from Gujarat died of cardiac arrest in Kedarnath but his body remained stranded for over five hours before his family was forced to pay Rs 65,000 to a private helicopter operator for transport.

Dilip Bhai Mannu Mali from Vadodara collapsed at 6.30 am on Wednesday, moments before the temple gates opened.

His son, **Hemant Bhai Mali**, said his father was declared dead at the Kedarnath Primary Health Centre at 7.30 am. The family said they were stranded for hours despite pleas to the administration. "We requested the district magistrate for a helicopter, but no arrangement was made until 1 pm despite assurances. We paid Rs 65,000 to a private company to fly the four of us, including my father's body, to the base," Hemant said. — *PTI*

Dilip Mali's family said they were stranded for 5 hours after Dilip died—*PTI*

Africa important in India's foreign policy: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday said that Africa occupies a central place in India's foreign policy today, and New Delhi's engagement with it is guided by a clear vision rooted in equality, mutual respect and shared progress.

Addressing a gathering at the unveiling of the logo and website for the India-Africa Forum Summit-IV, he said, "We gather here to mark the next chapter in the enduring partnership between India and Africa through the India-Africa Forum Summit framework."

He said the relationship is rooted in "our civilisational linkages," strengthened during anti-colonial struggles. "Our shared history of struggle, solidarity and aspirations continues to shape our partnership," he said, adding that Africa remains central to policy and global cooperation efforts today. —*PTI*

Labourer, 37, dies of suspected heatstroke in Keralam

KANNUR, 23 APRIL

A 37-year-old man died of suspected heatstroke here, police said on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Sanal Kumar MV, a native of Mowanchery in Pallipoyil, police said.

Police said the incident occurred at around 1.20 pm on Wednesday, when Kumar collapsed while engaged in the construction of a well.

He was initially taken to a clinic and later shifted to a private hospital for further treatment. "He died at around 2.55 am on Thursday, and doctors cited heatstroke as the cause of death. There is nothing suspicious," the FIR stated. A case of unnatural death has been registered at Chakkarakkallu police station, officials said.

People cover themselves during the Kaliyootu festival on a hot summer day in Thiruvananthapuram in Keralam on Thursday —*PTI*

RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan reeled under an intense heat spell, with the weather department issuing a heatwave warning for several areas from Thursday to Saturday.

According to the IMD's Meteorological Centre in Jaipur, maximum temperatures in most parts of the state have remained between 40 and 42 degrees Celsius for the past few days, which is 2-3 degrees above normal.

The department has forecast dry weather in the next three to four days, with temperatures likely to rise further by up to 2 degrees Celsius.

During this period, maximum temperatures are expected to range between 41 and 43 degrees Celsius in most parts of the state, while isolated places in northern Rajasthan may experience heatwave from 23 April to 25 April, it said.

ANDHRA PRADESH

In Andhra Pradesh, 95 mandals will witness several heatwave on Thursday, APSDMA Managing Director Prakhar Jain said in an official release.

On Friday, severe heatwave is likely in 50 mandals and 52 mandals will witness moderate heat, he said. — *PTI*

'CASE AT DEAD END'

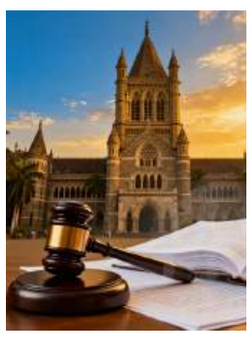
HC raps NIA for ignoring evidence in 2006 Malegaon blasts

MUMBAI, 23 APRIL

The 2006 Malegaon blasts case "seems to have reached a dead end," the Bombay High Court said while discharging four of the accused and pulling up the NIA for "completely ignoring" the evidence collected by the previous probing agency.

The HC's order on Wednesday left unanswered the question of who was responsible for the explosions that claimed 31 lives.

The HC discharged the four accused, Rajendra Chaudhary, Dhan Singh, Manohar Ram Singh Narwaria, and Lokesh Sharma, noting that evidence was insufficient to make them face trial in the case.



They were charged under Indian Penal Code for murder and criminal conspiracy, and the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA), a stringent anti-terror law.

The HC, while quashing the special court order of September 2025 framing charges against the four accused, stated the judge had then not "applied his mind." On 8 September 2006, four bombs exploded at Malegaon town in Maharashtra's Nashik district, three inside the premises of the Hamidia Masjid and Bada Kabrastan just after Friday prayers, and the fourth at Mushawarat Chowk, killing 31 persons and injuring 312 others.

A bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Shyam Chandak said the NIA "completely ignored" the probe and chargesheet of the ATS, which gives a vivid narration of the planning by the nine Muslim men arrested in the case.

The probe witnessed several twists and turns with the initial investigating agencies claiming the conspiracy was hatched by the Muslim accused, but the NIA, which later probed the case, alleged right-wing extremists were behind the powerful explosions. "The case seems to have reached a dead end. The diagonally opposite stories in the chargesheet filed by the ATS and the NIA lead nowhere," said the HC order, made available on Thursday. — *PTI*

The HC's order on Wednesday left unanswered the question of who was responsible for the explosions that claimed 31 lives—*PTI*

Fragmented 3rd front shrinks space in WB's TMC-BJP fight

AJUP Chief Humayun Kabir and AIMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi's tie-up fell apart in less than a month -PTI

The 2026 West Bengal Assembly election is not witnessing the rise of a coherent third front so much as the splintering of one, with Congress, Left, ISF and smaller Muslim-centric players occupying fragments of a shrinking space between the ruling TMC and BJP.

The result is not the disappearance of a third force, but its transformation into a scattered and localised phenomenon, strong enough to influence a few dozen seats, yet too divided to challenge the increasingly entrenched TMC-BJP binary.

In many constituencies, Bengal is beginning to resemble a state returning to a two-party system, where the real contest is between the TMC and the BJP, while the third front survives only as a spoiler in some places and a potential kingmaker in a handful.

Political observers estimate that multi-cornered contests involving Congress, Left, ISF, AJUP and smaller outfits may shape the outcome in around 35-40 seats. In the remaining nearly 250 constituencies, the battle is expected to be essentially bipolar.

That fragmentation, analysts say, could help both the TMC and the BJP, depending on the arithmetic of each constituency.

In areas where anti-incumbency against the state government is strong and no united secular alternative exists, anti-TMC voters are likely to shift towards the BJP rather than "waste" their vote on a divided Congress-Left space.

But, in minority-heavy constituencies, where the BJP has little presence, any division of the Muslim vote among the TMC, Congress, Left, ISF or AJUP could damage the ruling party more.

"Whenever there has been a united and credible third alternative, anti-TMC voters have had another option besides the BJP. That happened in 2016 when the Congress and Left fought together. But once that alliance disappears, voters return to the bipolar contest," political scientist Maidul Islam said.

The pattern has repeated itself through Bengal's recent elections.

In 2014, when the Congress, Left, TMC and BJP fought separately, the BJP's vote share jumped from around four per cent to 17 per cent. In 2016, when the Congress and Left forged an alliance, the BJP's rise stalled. But, after that understanding collapsed in 2019, the saffron party surged to nearly 40 per cent.

Again in 2021, when the Congress and Left fought together, the BJP's vote share dipped slightly.

Political analyst Subhomoy Moitra said the trend has remained remarkably consistent.

"Whenever the Left and Congress fought together, it has generally benefited the TMC. Whenever they fought separately, it has benefited the BJP," he said.

This time, however, even that old Congress-Left axis no longer exists in a structured form.

"People who want change no longer see the Congress or the Left as serious alternatives. In most seats, the BJP is now the only credible challenger to the TMC," said BJP leader Debjit Sarkar.

Within TMC, there is both relief and anxiety over the scattered opposition space.

"The absence of a united secular force helps us consolidate minority votes. But if Congress, Left, ISF and local Muslim leaders cut into our support in pockets, that can hurt us in close contests. The flip side is that anti-TMC votes also consolidate behind the BJP," a senior TMC leader said.

Congress insists that contesting separately is necessary to revive its organisation.

"Repeated alliances with both TMC and the Left have damaged our identity. Unless we fight independently, there will be no Congress left in Bengal," state Congress president Subhankar Sarkar said.

CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakraborty added:

"There is disenchantment with both the TMC and the BJP. The difficulty is that the anti-TMC, anti-BJP vote is fragmented," he said.

The only belt where the fragmented third front still appears capable of mounting a serious challenge is the Muslim-dominated arc stretching across Murshidabad, Malda and Uttar Dinajpur.

In that region, anti-incumbency against the TMC, resentment over local leadership and the search for an independent Muslim political voice had briefly created an opening for the Congress, Left, ISF and Humayun Kabir's AJUP.

Till March, smaller Muslim outfits appeared capable of cutting into TMC's minority base in nearly 100-110 seats. The anger ranged from the Waqf law and OBC reservation issues to allegations of neglect in madrasa recruitment.

But, the mood shifted sharply after the SIR of electoral rolls resulted in deletion of more than 91 lakh names across the state.

Political parties estimate that around 31 lakh of those removed may be Muslims and nearly 61 lakh Hindus.

The SIR deletions, BJP's promise to implement a Uniform Civil Code and collapse of the AIMIM-AJUP alliance have together revived the fear among minority electors that a divided vote could ultimately help the BJP.

"The minority vote had shown signs of drifting away from TMC. But, the last three weeks have changed the mood. Many voters now feel however unhappy they are with the ruling party, they cannot afford to divide their vote," Islam said.

That is significant because the districts worst affected by the deletions, North and South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Malda, are among the TMC's principal strongholds. Any reduction in the minority electorate, therefore, hurts mainly the TMC and, to a lesser degree, the Congress-Left combine. Yet, the fear created by the deletions may also push a section of minority voters towards the TMC, reducing the space available to the ISF, Congress and AJUP. Outside the minority belt, the fragmented third front appears even weaker. In north Bengal, where BJP is strongest, there is little indication that Congress or Left can substantially erode the saffron party's support. In south Bengal, any limited revival of Left is more likely to eat into BJP votes. Historically, Bengal has moved between long phases of bipolar politics and shorter bursts of fragmented politics.

What remains in 2026 is not a third front in the classical sense, but a fragmented political residue – influential in pockets, decisive in a few dozen seats, but unable to break the TMC-BJP binary. —PTI

Commuters pass through a busy street decorated with the BJP and TMC flags in Bengal -PTI

SALAR ساہر

Fun, surprise & emotion add spice to voting in TN

The Tamil Nadu Assembly election on Thursday turned out to be a kaleidoscope of tidbits, tense moments and curiosity.

Incidents like AIADMK leader and former Minister Dindigul C Srinivasan reportedly pressing the 'red light' on the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) instead of the button to cast vote amused people. Later, the polling official pointed to the button and he cast his vote.

Polling was on across 234 Assembly segments in the state with over 4,000 candidates in fray.

In Coimbatore, Vellore and Dharmapuri districts, 'Robo Tina,' dressed like a cute little girl welcomed voters to the polling station and gave flowers and chocolates to the people.

Some, working in foreign countries including Singapore and in cities outside of Tamil Nadu arrived in their hometowns including Chennai to cast their votes.

At Namakkal, a "super elderly" woman, Mariaayi, reportedly 110 years old, cast her vote. Speaking to reporters, she said she had seen so many leaders including DMK founder CN Annadurai and AIADMK founder MG Ramachandran in her life. At Pallipalayam in Namakkal, a 60-year old bedridden woman was brought to the polling station in an ambulance to ensure she performs her democratic duty.

Similarly, several persons with disabilities and health issues were brought in wheel chairs to the polling stations.

Election Commission arranged three boats to help villagers off the Pechiparai dam falling under the Padmanabhapuram Constituency in Kanyakumari district to reach the polling station to cast their votes.

Voters linked to Vengaivayal village in Pudukottai district boycotted polling over the incident of faeces being mixed in an overhead water tank a few years ago. They demanded justice over the incident.

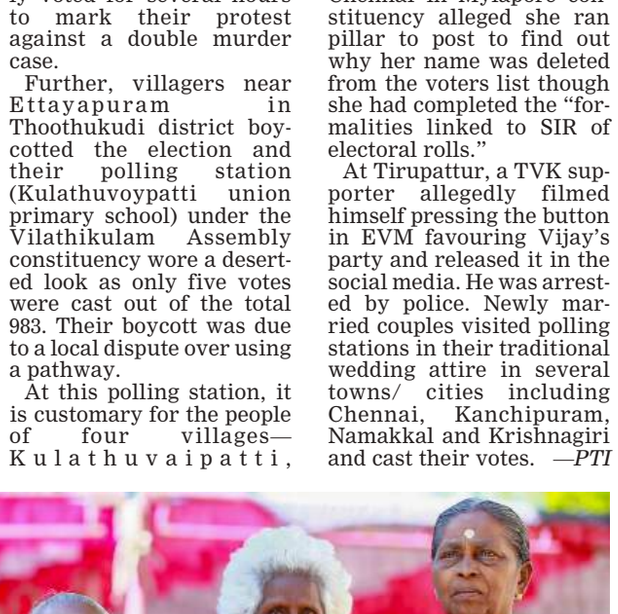
At Perumpathu village in Nanguneri constituency in southern Tamil Nadu, not even single person allegedly voted for several hours to mark their protest against a double murder case.

Further, villagers near Ettayapuram in Thoothukudi district boycotted the election and their polling station (Kulathuvoypatti union primary school) under the Vilathikulam Assembly constituency wore a deserted look as only five votes were cast out of the total 983. Their boycott was due to a local dispute over using a pathway.

At this polling station, it is customary for the people of four villages—Kulathuvaipatti, Kumaragiri, Sothunaickanpatti, and Ammampadam—to cast their votes. However, this time, the people of Kulathuvaipatti and Kumaragiri villages have boycotted the election.

A woman resident of Chennai in Mylapore constituency alleged she ran pillar to post to find out why her name was deleted from the voters list though she had completed the "formalities linked to SIR of electoral rolls."

At Tirupattur, a TVK supporter allegedly filmed himself pressing the button in EVM favouring Vijay's party and released it in the social media. He was arrested by police. Newly married couples visited polling stations in their traditional wedding attire in several towns/ cities including Chennai, Kanchipuram, Namakkal and Krishnagiri and cast their votes. —PTI



Tina, a robot, dressed in traditional attire, welcomes voters at a polling station in Coimbatore on Thursday -PTI

Elderly women vote in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar on Thursday -PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Nuclear energy is having a global revival 40 yrs after Chernobyl

In 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant's fourth reactor exploded in a catastrophic meltdown. A 2000 study found that some molds grew densely in highly irradiated areas. The star being Cladosporium sphaerospermum. Researchers theorise that this fungi is performing 'radiosynthesis', living off of ionising radiation -WIKICOMMONS

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine, one of the worst nuclear accidents in history, triggered widespread fears about atomic energy and significantly slowed its development across Europe and beyond. Four decades on, however, nuclear power is staging a strong global comeback, driven by rising energy demand, climate goals and renewed concerns over energy security, particularly amid ongoing geopolitical conflicts.

Today, more than 400 nuclear reactors operate across 31 countries, with around 70 additional units under construction. Nuclear energy currently produces about 10 per cent of the world's electricity, accounting for roughly a quarter of all low-carbon power generation.

Technological advancements have made modern reactors safer and more cost-efficient, addressing many concerns that followed disasters such as Chernobyl and the 2011 Fukushima accident in Japan. Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, said the revival had long been anticipated but has now gained momentum due to geopolitical tensions, including the war in the West Asia.

"I am 100 per cent sure nuclear is coming back," Birol said, describing it as a secure and reliable source of electricity that will see strong growth across the Americas, Europe and Asia.

The United States remains the world's largest producer of nuclear energy, operating 94 reactors that generate about 30 per cent of global nuclear electricity. Washington is now pushing to expand its nuclear capacity, with ambitions to quadruple output by 2050. US Undersecretary of State Thomas DiNanno recently said nuclear power is essential to meet industrial demand, support artificial intelligence and secure future energy needs.

China, meanwhile, is rapidly expanding its nuclear footprint. It operates 61 reactors and leads globally in new construction, with nearly 40 reactors being built. Beijing aims to overtake the United States as the largest nuclear power producer.

In Europe, attitudes towards nuclear energy are shifting. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has acknowledged that reducing reliance on nuclear power was a "strategic mistake", particularly as the continent seeks to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels. Nuclear energy, once sidelined, is now being reconsidered as part of the clean energy mix alongside renewables such as wind and solar.

In 1990, nuclear energy accounted for about one-third of Europe's electricity generation. Today, that share has dropped to roughly 15 per cent. However, the European Union is now exploring new initiatives, including the development of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), which are expected to become operational in the early 2030s. These are seen as cheaper, faster to deploy and more flexible than traditional large-scale reactors.

France remains a strong proponent of nuclear power, with 57 reactors across 19 plants supplying nearly 70 per cent of its electricity. Successive governments have backed nuclear energy as central to the country's energy independence. In 2022, President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to build six new reactors to support decarbonisation efforts.

Other European nations present a mixed picture. Sweden and Finland continue to support nuclear development, while Germany, Austria and Italy have moved away from it. Germany shut down its last three nuclear plants in 2023 after years of political and public opposition. Despite some recent discussions around SMRs, Chancellor Friedrich Merz has indicated that the decision is effectively irreversible due to ongoing dismantling processes.

Belgium has reversed its earlier stance, extending the lifespan of its reactors, while Spain still plans to phase out nuclear energy between 2027 and 2035.

Russia has emerged as a major global player in nuclear energy, both domestically and internationally. It operates 34 reactors and is constructing new units at multiple sites, including Kursk, Leningrad and Smolensk. Russia is also building 20 reactors abroad across Europe, Asia, Africa and the West Asia, and has signed agreements with several additional countries.

Notably, Russia continues to operate modernised versions of RBMK reactors, similar to the design involved in the Chernobyl disaster, but with enhanced safety features.

Ukraine, despite the legacy of Chernobyl, still relies heavily on nuclear energy, which provides about half of its electricity. Its nuclear infrastructure has become even more critical since Russia's invasion in 2022. Russian forces have occupied the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, raising global concerns about nuclear safety in conflict zones. Japan, which shut down most of its reactors after Fukushima, has restarted 15 units and is reviewing applications for 10 more. The country has incorporated stringent safety upgrades following the disaster.

Elsewhere, nuclear energy is gradually expanding into new regions. South Africa remains the only African nation with an operational nuclear plant, but Russia is building one in Egypt, while several other African countries are exploring nuclear options.

According to Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the renewed momentum reflects a growing recognition that reliable, low-carbon electricity is essential to meet rising global energy demand. Energy crises in recent years, including disruptions linked to the Ukraine war and volatility in the West Asia, have exposed the limitations of relying solely on renewables and highlighted continued dependence on fossil fuels. Analysts say these factors have strengthened the case for nuclear energy as a stable and scalable alternative.

Despite the renewed enthusiasm, nuclear power continues to face opposition in some regions due to concerns over safety, costs and waste management. Environmental groups remain cautious, particularly in countries affected by past nuclear accidents. —PTI

France, UK ink £662M deal to stop Channel crossings

LONDON, 23 APRIL

The UK and France have agreed a new £662 million, three-year deal aimed at halting illegal Channel crossings. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood signed the agreement, which will see at least 50 riot-trained police officers deployed in France to manage violence and hostile crowds. France will also deploy drones, helicopters, and camera systems to intercept migrants and smugglers. Mahmood described the deal as a "landmark agreement" to combat people smuggling. French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said it "empowers our security forces to continue their crucial work." Critics, including Conservatives and Reform UK, condemned the deal, arguing it offers funding with no conditions. In 2025, over 41,000 migrants arrived by small boat. *—PTI*

Lanka hackers steal USD 2.5M from Finance Ministry

COLOMBO, 23 APRIL

Sri Lanka's Finance Ministry confirmed that cyber hackers accessed the computer system of the External Resources Department, stealing USD 2.5 million. The theft involved a partial payment for foreign debt, with opposition claims suggesting funds went to an unauthorised account. Law enforcement agencies have been informed. Opposition lawyers wrote to the parliamentary speaker urging an inquiry, citing concerns over public finances. The government spokesperson, Nalinda Jayathissa, stated an official response would be issued soon. The issue was discussed at the Parliament's Committee on Public Accounts. The theft has raised serious concerns over Sri Lanka's cyber security and financial oversight, with authorities actively investigating the breach and its implications for public funds. *—PTI*

Chemical leak at West Virginia plant kills two, injures 19

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

A chemical leak at Catalyst Refiners in West Virginia resulted in two deaths and 19 hospitalisations, authorities confirmed. The incident occurred during plant shutdown preparations when a violent nitric acid reaction caused an overreaction, according to Kanawha County Emergency Management Director CW Sigman. Seven ambulance staff were among those injured. Some victims were taken to hospital in private vehicles or a garbage truck. A shelter in place was issued for nearby areas and lifted after five hours. All casualties occurred on-site. Sigman explained, "You had to get really close to the facility to smell it." The plant is located near Institute, about 10 miles west of Charleston. *—PTI*

11 killed as Islamic militants attack Nigerian village

MAIDUGURI, 23 APRIL

Islamic militants attacked a remote village in Borno state, killing 11 people and critically injuring two. The assault took place late on Tuesday in Pubagu, on the fringes of Sambisa forest, attributed to Boko Haram. Villagers reported that militants set several houses ablaze before leaving. The victims were buried on Wednesday, and the injured received hospital treatment. The village had previously been considered safe, but the attack highlights ongoing insecurity in Nigeria's rural areas. Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other groups continue to exploit security gaps, engaging in violence, kidnapping, and illegal activities. The attack underscores Nigeria's long-standing security challenges amid ongoing insurgency. *—PTI*

May take 6 months to clear mines in Hormuz: Pentagon

Strait to stay closed: Iran slams US blockade

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

The IRGC released footage of personnel boarding a ship on Wednesday *—SCREENGRAB*

The Pentagon has reportedly informed the US Congress that clearing naval mines that may be positioned by the Iranian military could take up to six months.

According to a House Armed Services Committee briefing detailed by three officials to The Washington Post, this timeline raises critical "concerns" that energy costs may stay high even if a broader peace deal is reached.

A senior defence official informed legislators that some of these explosives were "deployed remotely using GPS technology," a sophisticated method that is "harder for US forces to detect."

It is unclear how many mines have been deployed in the Strait by Iran, even as US President Donald Trump insisted that minesweeping would be expedited.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkia said in a statement that the US' blockade of Iranian ports and military threats remain the main obstacles to genuine negotiations.

"Iran has welcomed dialogue and agreement and continues to do so," Pezeshkian added.

His comments come as negotiations appear to have stalled between the US and Iran. The negotiations were scheduled to take place in Islamabad earlier this week. The first round of negotiation in Islamabad ended without any significant breakthrough. Some Iranian media channels have also accused Pakistan of playing a "double game".

Still, Pakistani Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday met US Charge d'Affaires to Pakistan, Natalie Baker to discuss efforts to hold a second-round of talks.

Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, meanwhile, said that Tehran would not open the Strait due to the "blatant violations" of the ceasefire with the US. Qalibaf, who served as Iran's top negotiator in talks with the US, cited the US blockade of Iran's trade activity in international waters and Israel's attacks on Lebanon.

Deputy Speaker of Iran's Parliament, Hamidreza Haji Babaei, told the semi-official Tasnim News Agency that the first tranche of tolls collected from ships passing the Strait have been deposited into the Iranian central bank's account. *—Agencies*

Pahlavi splattered with red liquid in Berlin

Iran's exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi was splattered with red liquid on Thursday as he left a building in Berlin, Germany. Pahlavi had just departed a news briefing, where he criticised the ceasefire between the US and Iran, when the incident occurred outside Germany's federal press conference building. The alleged perpetrator was immediately detained by police.

Israel kills 5 near mosque in Gaza

An Israeli air strike has targeted a group of civilians near a mosque in northern Gaza, killing at least five Palestinians, according to Gaza's civil defence agency. Two children were among the killed. At least 750 people have been killed by Israel since the ceasefire in October.

Pak must curb terror groups: US lawmaker

US Congressman Brad Sherman has called on Pakistan to clamp down on terror groups such as the LeT, which has been linked to the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. The Democrat was speaking at an event organised by the Indian Embassy in Washington.

Meds harder to get in Sudan due to Iran war

Medicine prices in Sudan have spiked due to the Iran war, with many pharmacies in the war-torn country out of stock. The International Rescue Committee, said about $1,30,000 worth of pharmaceuticals for Sudan was stranded in Dubai for weeks.

US Navy Secy John Phelan resigns abruptly

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

Navy Secretary John Phelan is leaving his job, the Pentagon abruptly announced on Wednesday. He is first head of a military service to depart during President Donald Trump's second term, but just the latest top defence leader to step down or be ousted.

No reason was given for the unexpected departure of the Navy's top civilian official.

Another Trump loyalist is taking over as acting head of the Navy: Undersecretary Hung Cao, a 25-year Navy combat veteran who ran unsuccessful campaigns for the US Senate and House in Virginia.

Phelan's departure is the latest in a series of shakeups of top leadership at the Pentagon, coming just weeks after Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth fired the Army's top uniformed officer, Gen Randy George, having earlier sacked several other high-ranking officials.

Just a day earlier, Phelan had addressed a large crowd of professionals at the Navy's annual conference in Washington, indicating how sudden his decision was.

Notably, Phelan had not served in the military or had a civilian leadership role before US President Donald Trump nominated him for secretary in late 2024. He was seen as an outsider being brought in to shake up the Navy. He was also a major donor to Trump's campaign and had founded the private investment firm Rugger Management LLC.

Cao, meanwhile, can be seen as a hardliner – having compared former president Joe Biden's government to the communist state in Vietnam, refusing the mandated Covid vaccine, and calling for curbs on military aid to Ukraine. *—PTI*

Lebanon, Israel to hold 2nd peace talks

BEIRUT, 23 APRIL

Lebanon and Israel were set to begin their second session of direct talks in Washington on Thursday and discuss the possibility of extending a truce between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group.

The talks between Lebanese Ambassador to the US Nada Hamadeh Moawad and her Israeli counterpart Yechiel Leitercome days after they held their first such direct between the two countries in three decades.

Lebanon President Joseph Aoun hoped to extend the 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah that went into effect on Friday.

Hamadeh will put forward an extension of the ceasefire during the meeting and ask for an end to ongoing Israeli home demolitions in villages and towns occupied by Israel after the latest war broke out on 2 March, Aoun said in comments released by his office.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar called on Lebanon to work with Israel to disarm the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah ahead of negotiations in Washington.

He described Lebanon as a "failed state" but said "We don't have any serious disagreements with Lebanon. There are a few minor border disputes that can be solved".

Israeli soldiers currently occupy roughly 5 per cent of Lebanese territory, where they have set up a "yellow line", similar to the border in Gaza.

Hezbollah has outright rejected the idea of peace talks with Israel. *—PTI*

Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon. Israel currently holds roughly 5 per cent of Lebanese territory and maintain a 'yellow line' *—X@IDFONLINE*

Israel kills Lebanese journalist in double tap strike

BEIRUT, 23 APRIL

A Lebanese journalist was killed on Wednesday in an Israeli airstrike on a house in southern Lebanon. She had taken cover in the house while reporting on the war. Her body was only retrieved from the rubble hours later, rescue workers said.

The daily Al-Akhbar newspaper said its reporter Amal Khalil was killed in the southern village of al-Tiri. She said she had recieved threats earlier.

The Lebanese health ministry said the first strike killed two people. A second Israeli strike then hit the house in al-Tiri where Khalil and her colleague Zeinab Faraj had taken cover.

At first, rescue workers were able to get to Faraj, who was seriously wounded, and retrieve the bodies of two killed in the first airstrike. But they were fired on by Israeli forces so they were forced to halt rescue operations. Khalil remained under the rubble for hours before the Lebanese army, civil defence and the Lebanese Red Cross were able to get to her. *—PTI*

Senate passes budget plan to reopen DHS

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

The US Senate took initial steps on Thursday to reopen the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), voting to pass a budget bill funding ICE and Border Patrol. During the all-night session, Democrats opposed the Republican immigration push with amendments to cut healthcare and consumer costs.

The department has been shuttered since mid-February as Democrats push for policy changes in the wake of federal agents fatally shooting two protesters.

After federal agents shot Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis in January, Trump agreed to a Democratic request that the DHS bill would be separated from a larger spending measure that became law.

Democrats say any DHS funding bill should place restraints on federal immigration authorities—including better officer identification and increased use of judicial warrants—among other provisions. Seeking to fund the two agencies for the remainder of Trump's term, Republicans are pushing a $70 billion budget resolution through reconciliation. Because this process requires only a simple majority, they can bypass the 60-vote filibuster threshold despite holding just 53 seats. *—PTI*

Modi, Trump, Xi, should tell Putin to stop: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 23 APRIL

Ukraine cannot wait for the Iran war to for peace talks with Russia to resume, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview that aired on Thursday.

"(US) President (Donald) Trump, (Chinese) President Xi (Jinping), Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi, and other big players in the world have to tell (Russian President Vladimir) Putin that he has to stop this war. They can't tell Ukraine 'you have to stop the war'. We are defending. We are not aggressors," he told CNN.

"And if we truly want to stop him, I am not sure that powerful countries can be mediators," he added.

Zelenskyy noted that same team of US negotiators –US envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner – were leading both the Iran and Ukraine talks, saying it was a "challenge" to secure the next round of peace talks.

China and India are the two largest buyers of Russian oil.

Zelenskyy's comments come as the European Union approved a 90-billion-euro (USD 106 billion) loan package to Ukraine after Hungary lifted its veto. *—Agencies*

5 CRITICAL AS 2 DANISH TRAINS COLLIDE HEAD ON IN 'MAJOR INCIDENT'

COPENHAGEN, 23 APRIL

Two trains collided in Denmark early Thursday, leaving five people critically injured in what police called a major incident. The collision occurred around 6:30 am near Hillerød, about 40km north of Copenhagen. Roughly a dozen other people have minor injuries, according to the Greater Copenhagen Fire Department.

Investigators are looking into what caused the collision, and it was not clear if the drivers were among the injured..

Photos from the scene show the front ends of the trains smashed, though both remained upright on the tracks. *—PTI*

LAHORE TOPS LIST

Kathmandu air quality ranked 2nd most polluted

KATHMANDU, 23 APRIL

—ANI

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Nepal's capital has deteriorated sharply in the last 24 hours, making Kathmandu the second-most polluted city in the world, according to IQAir. Kathmandu's AQI is at 247, placing it just behind Pakistan's Lahore, which tops the global list at 381.

An AQI reading between 151–200 is "unhealthy", while levels of 201–300 are "very unhealthy," and any reading above 300 is considered "hazardous."

Pollution in Kathmandu is driven by a combination of industrial output, residential emissions, open waste burning, and a high volume of vehicles that fail to meet emission standards.

These sources saturate the air with PM2.5—particulate matter under 2.5 micrometres. These particles remain suspended in the air and are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and even the bloodstream.

Nepal's air quality falls well below World Health Organisation safety standards. Pollution claims 42,000 lives annually—19 per cent of which are children under five and 27 per cent are those over 70 years—reducing the average Nepali life expectancy by 4.1 per cent.

Kathmandu covers 413 square kilometres — less than a quarter of Lahore's 1,772 square kilometres. Its population of 1.99 million yields a population density of roughly 4,815 people per sq km. *—ANI*

Turkey approves bill to restrict social media for under-15 kids

ISTANBUL, 23 APRIL

—FREEPIK

Turkish lawmakers have passed a bill that restricts social media access for children under 15, according to state media. The legislation follows a recent tragic incident where a 14-year-old killed nine students and a teacher in Kahramanmaras. Police are investigating the perpetrator's online activity to understand his motives.

The bill will require social media platforms to introduce age-verification systems, parental controls, and rapid response measures for harmful content, said Anadolu news agency. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan must approve the bill within 15 days for it to become law. Erdogan has emphasised the need to mitigate online risks, stating, "Some digital sharing applications are corrupting our children's minds and social media platforms have, to put it bluntly, become cesspools."

The main opposition, CHP, criticised the proposal, advocating rights-based protection rather than bans. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram would be blocked for under-15s.

The Turkish government has previously restricted online platforms during protests. *—PTI*

—FREEPIK

Rupee falls to Rs 94.11 against USD

MUMBAI, 23 APRIL

The rupee settled 33 paise lower at 94.11 (provisional) on Thursday amid soaring crude oil prices as West Asia peace talks moved to an uncertain trajectory. Massive selling of domestic equities and incessant withdrawal of foreign funds amid rising worldwide demand for the American currency further weighed on the domestic unit, which has lost over 1 per cent in a week, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.03 and hit an intra-day low of 94.17 against the greenback. It also touched the day's high of 93.98. In the past four sessions, the domestic unit has lost 120 paise. The dollar index was 0.12 per cent higher at 98.53. *—PTI*

Gold futures fall to Rs 1.5L/10g, silver at Rs 2.4L/kg

Gold prices on Thursday dropped Rs 707 to Rs 1,51,950 per 10 grams in futures trade amid a fall in spot demand, while silver prices fell by Rs 4,205 to Rs 2,44,159 per kilogram as participants reduced their bets. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold contracts for the June delivery traded lower by Rs 707, or 0.46 per cent, at Rs 1,51,950 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 564 lots. Silver contracts for the May delivery declined Rs 4,205, or 1.69 per cent, to Rs 2,44,159 per kg in a business turnover of 1,281 lots. Globally, gold futures declined by 0.83 per cent to USD 4,700.79 per ounce. Silver was trading 2.06 per cent lower at USD 76.10 per ounce. Analysts attributed the fall in gold prices to weal global cues. They attributed the decline in silver prices to a sell-off.*—PTI*

Rice exports fall 7.5% to USD 11.53B

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

India's rice exports declined by 7.5 per cent to USD 11.53 billion in 2025-26, influenced by reduced shipments to key markets, including West Asian countries, according to commerce ministry data. Exports in March fell 15.36 per cent to USD 997.53 million. The West Asia region, comprising Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, has been affected by the US-Israel and Iran conflict, impacting trade flows. Iran, India's leading basmati rice destination, faces mounting stress on order flow, payments, and shipping schedules due to regional instability. Reports indicate importers are struggling to honour commitments and remit payments, creating uncertainty for Indian exporters. In 2024-25, India exported 20.1 million tonnes of rice valued at USD 12.5 billion, reaching over 172 countries. India produced around 150 million tonnes in 2024-25.*—PTI*

Bernstein urges reforms, warns of complacency risks

Says AI threatens services sector that powers middle class

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

India risks squandering recent economic gains unless it accelerates structural reforms, particularly in jobs, manufacturing and innovation, brokerage Bernstein warned in an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The brokerage cited stronger macro stability and earnings growth driven by a shift toward capital expenditure.

India's rise in global GDP rankings and focus on infrastructure spending over subsidies have underpinned growth, Bernstein said, but the global environment is shifting rapidly, with supply chains being redrawn and technological disruption accelerating.

Generative artificial intelligence threatens the services sector that has powered India's middle class. Most AI value creation remains concentrated in the United States and China. India becomes a user of these technologies without capturing a commensurate share of the upside.

India also risks falling behind in artificial intelligence by focusing on data centres rather than building foundational technologies *—X*

Bernstein questioned whether manufacturing can absorb displaced labour at scale, noting that private capital expenditure remains selective and the much-touted 'China+1' shift has been slower to translate into jobs.

India also risks falling behind in artificial intelligence by focusing on data centres rather than building foundational technologies.

In the agricultural sector, 42-45 per cent of India's workforce contribute only about 15-16 per cent of GDP. It called for renewed reforms, increased irrigation and reduced reliance on subsidies.

On energy, the brokerage flagged persistent inefficiencies in power distribution and heavy reliance on imported crude oil, calling for a clearer transition toward electric mobility.

- In the agricultural sector, 42-45 per cent of the workforce contribute only 15-16 per cent of GDP. It called for reforms, increased irrigation and reduced reliance on subsidies.

Manufacturing stands at 16-17 per cent of GDP despite policy initiatives, with supply chains shallow and dependence on imports high in sectors such as electric vehicle batteries.

The brokerage also raised concerns about rising cash transfer schemes by states, estimating annual outlays of Rs 1.7-2.5 lakh crore.

On transport, Bernstein argued for greater focus on rail and mass transit over aviation. India's spending on research and development, at about 0.6-0.7 per cent of GDP, remains well below global benchmarks. *—PTI*

SENSEX FALLS 852.49 PTS

Markets extend losses as crude hits USD 100

MUMBAI, 23 APRIL

Stock markets fell on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex tumbling 852.49 points, as crude oil prices once again breached the USD 100 per barrel mark amid stalled US-Iran negotiations.

Sustained foreign fund outflows, along with a weak trend in Asian and European equities, also unnerved investors.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 852.49 points, or 1.09 per cent, to settle at 77,664. A total of 2,517 stocks declined, while 1,762 advanced and 170 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 205.05 points, or 0.84 per cent, to end at 24,173.05.

From the Sensex pack, Trent, Bajaj Finserv, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys and HDFC Bank were among the major laggards. In contrast, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel and Bharat Electronics were the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 1.89 per cent higher at USD 103.8 per barrel.

"The price action reflects a clear shift from resilience to risk aversion as global uncertainties intensify and domestic triggers fail to provide support," Hariprasad K, research nalyst and founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

The BSE MidCap Select index declined 0.39 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index dipped 0.34 per cent.

On the sectoral front, public sector bank dropped 2.36 per cent, auto (2.27 per cent), realty (1.91 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.71 per cent), consumer durables (1.63 per cent) and bankex (1.46 per cent). Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 2,078.36 crore on 22 April. *—PTI*

India 'tough nut to crack': USTR Greer on US-India trade talks

WASHINGTON, 23 APRIL

India is a "tough nut to crack", US Trade representative **Jamieson Greer** said as a delegation from New Delhi concluded negotiations on a bilateral trade agreement with Washington.

The 12-member delegation, led by Darpan Jain, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce, held detailed discussions with the US team led by Brendan Lynch, Assistant USTR for South and Central Asia. The three-day talks ended on 22 April.

Greer told the US Congress Committee on Ways and Means that India has long protected its agricultural markets, making negotiations difficult. "India is a tough nut to crack... they've protected their agricultural markets for a very long time," he said.

He added that mutual agreement could be found in some areas, citing DDGs (distillers dried grains) as an example. The US negotiators discussed specific issues such as DDGs, soybean meal, and ethanol with their Indian counterparts.

India and the US announced the framework of the trade deal on 2 February. The target is to reach USD 500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030. The US agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 50 per cent, removing tariffs on Russian oil and planning to cut the remaining tariffs to 18 per cent.

However, the US Supreme Court ruled against Trump's reciprocal tariffs. India seeks to recalibrate the agreement to protect its interests. *—PTI*

- The 12-member delegation, led by Darpan Jain, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce, held detailed discussions with the US team led by Brendan Lynch, Assistant USTR for South and Central Asia. The talks ended on 22 April.

Amazon to invest Rs 2,800 cr for workers' wellbeing

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

Amazon India on Thursday said it plans to invest over Rs 2,800 crore to strengthen associate safety, health, and financial well-being measures and to boost its operations across the country.

This is part of the company's stated commitment to infuse more than USD 35 billion in India by 2030, focusing on business expansion and other measures such as AI-driven digitisation, export growth, and job creation.

Amazon will expand both its core and quick commerce footprint to continue serving customers across India in minutes, hours, and days, the company said.

Amazon said it will expand associate wellbeing programmes, including further investment in Project Ashray, enhance medical and accident insurance, and enable access to government social security benefits for tens of thousands of associates and over 200,000 community members.

"This investment builds on the company's Rs 2,000 crore investment in 2025, which enabled the launch of 17 new fulfilment centres, six sortation centres, and 75 last-mile delivery stations across India," Amazon said.

In 2025, Amazon launched its quick commerce offering, Amazon Now, and has since scaled it to over 300 micro-fulfilment centres. *—PTI*

India may have 51% more billionaires by 2031: Knight Frank

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

India is projected to have 25,217 ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNWIs) and 313 billionaires by 2031, driven by wealth creation across technology, industrials and capital markets, according to Knight Frank.

UHNWIs are individuals with a net worth of USD 30 million or more. India currently has 19,877 UHNWIs and 207 billionaires.

In its 20th edition of The Wealth Report 2026, released on Thursday, Knight Frank highlighted a "dramatic acceleration" in global wealth creation despite geopolitical uncertainty, rising interest rates and uneven economic performance.

"India's UHNWI population is forecast to rise from 19,877 today to 25,217 by 2031, underscoring its growing role in the global wealth landscape," the report said.

Mumbai accounts for 35.4 per cent of India's UHNWI population, while the country ranks sixth globally in this segment.

Worldwide, the UHNWI population has grown to 713,626 from 551,435 in 2021.

India's billionaire count has risen 58 per cent over the past five years to 207 in 2026, ranking third globally after the United States (914) and China (485). This number is expected to grow 51 per cent to 313 by 2031. *—PTI*

Government not to raise petrol, diesel prices

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

The government on Thursday dismissed reports suggesting petrol and diesel prices may be hiked by Rs 25-28 a litre soon after Assembly elections, saying there is no such proposal under consideration.

The clarification Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas by the came after a report by Kotak Institutional Equities hinted of a steep increase in petrol and diesel prices once the polling for Assembly elections in states like West Bengal ends on 29 April. Kotak projected a Rs 25-28 a litre increase in price based on crude oil staying close to USD 120 per barrel.

The Ministry said such reports are "designed to create fear and panic amongst the citizens and are mischievous and misleading." The government and oil PSUs have taken relentless steps in order to insulate the Indian citizens from steep increases in international prices, it said.

International oil prices spiked after US and Israel attacked Iran, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that shut the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas pass.

Oil prices spiked from around USD 70 per barrel to USD 119 before seeing some correction. Renewed tensions have pushed Brent benchmark - to USD 103-106 per barrel.

Petrol is priced at Rs 94.77 a litre in New Delhi and diesel comes for Rs 87.67. *—PTI*

Andhra to get Rs 5,400 cr solar manufacturing facility

ANAKAPALLI, 23 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday laid the foundation for a Rs 5,400-crore ReNew solar manufacturing plant in Anakapalli .

The six GW ingot and wafer production unit at Rambilli aims to strengthen India's domestic solar supply chain.

Addressing a public meeting, Naidu stated that Anakapalli is attracting significant investments and will soon lead in infrastructure development.

The plant, established by the sons of former union minister Yashwanth Sinha and Sumanth Sinha, will reduce import reliance and enhance energy security. It is expected to be operational within 24 months and create over 2,100 jobs.

Naidu highlighted large-scale investments in power generation, including Rs 82,000 crore by Sinha and Rs 10,370 crore worth of renewable projects in Anantapur and Kurnool districts.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at the launch of the solar plant in Anakapalli on Thursday *—X/CHANDRABABHNAIDU*

He announced plans for 40 lakh solar units on homes, electric vehicles, and 5,000 charging stations.

Additionally, Bhogapuram Airport will open in July, and Godavari water will be channelled to Anakapalli through the Sujala Sravanthi project.

Naidu assured the Polavaram Project's completion before Godavari Pushkaralu and highlighted 802 deals, generating 24 lakh jobs in 22 months. *—PTI*

RESHAPING HOLLYWOOD

Warner Bros approves Paramount's $ 81B deal

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

An USD 81 billion Warner-Paramount mega merger has received shareholders' approval, propelling a deal that could vastly reshape Hollywood and the wider media landscape.

Warner Bros. Discovery shareholders on Thursday voted in support of selling the entire business to Paramount for USD 31 a share. The deal is worth nearly USD 111 billion, including debts.

Skydance-owned Paramount wants to buy all of Warner. That means HBO Max, cult-favorite titles like 'Harry Potter' and CNN could soon find themselves under the same roof with CBS, 'Top Gun' and the Paramount+ streaming service.

The acquisition still faces ongoing regulatory reviews, including from the US Department of Justice. Warner plans to close it in the third fiscal quarter.

Actors, directors and writers have opposed the deal *—X/WIKIPEDIA*

Meanwhile, Warner shareholders rejected a separate measure that outlined post-merger payments for company executives.

In 2025, Warner rebuffed Paramount's overtures to instead strike a USD 72 billion studio and streaming deal with Netflix. Paramount, meanwhile, went directly to shareholders with a hostile bid to take over the whole company.

Thousands of actors, directors, writers and other industry professionals have voiced "unequivocal opposition" to the deal, arguing that further consolidation will lead to job losses and fewer choices for filmmakers and movie goers.

The merger would bring together two of Hollywood's remaining five legacy studios, join two major streaming platforms and two big media houses, as well as a heap of other brands and entertainment networks.

Company executives argue consumers will have access to bigger content libraries. Paramount CEO David Ellison assured filmmakers with a 45-day theatrical window guarantee and goal to release 30 movies a year between Paramount and Warner

But the new owner will cut costs through layoffs and downsizing some overlapping operations. *—PTI*

BCCL Q4 profit plunges 58.9% post IPO

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

Coal India arm Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), fresh from a blockbuster stock market debut earlier this year, reported a sharp 58.9 per cent fall in net profit to Rs 27.28 crore for the quarter ended 31 March, 2026, hit by lower revenue.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 66.50 crore in the corresponding period last year, BCCL said in a filing to the BSE. Revenue from operations declined to Rs 3,282.95 crore from Rs 3,865 crore a year ago.

For the full year ended 31 March, net profit plunged to Rs 128.28 crore compared with Rs 1,240.19 crore in FY25. Annual revenue also fell to Rs 13,644.78 crore from Rs 15,917.21 crore. Coal production dropped to 35.52 million tonnes in 2025-26. *—PTI*

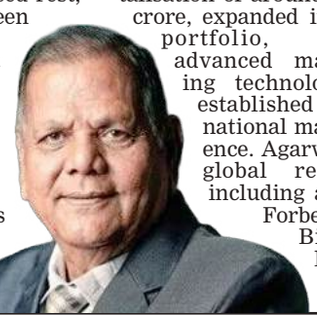
Bikaji founder Shiv Ratan Agarwal dies at 75

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

Shiv Ratan Agarwal, the founder and promoter of Bikaji Foods International, passed away at the age of 75 on Thursday.

The 74-year-old complained of uneasiness and was rushed to a private hospital in Tamil Nadu's capital, where he breathed his last.

His wife had recently undergone a heart bypass surgery, and doctors had advised rest, due to which he had been staying in Chennai.



Agarwal, a resident of Sardulganj in Bikaner, founded the Bikaji brand in 1993. What began as a small venture grew into a major food brand, Bikaji Foods has grown into India's third largest ethnic snacks company and is the second fastest-growing player in the organised snacks market.

In a career spanning over five decades in the ethnic snacks and sweets industry, Agarwal built Bikaji from a local Bikaner enterprise into a publicly listed, globally recognised packaged food company.

Under his stewardship, the company, with a market capitalisation of around Rs 13,430 crore, expanded its product portfolio, adopted advanced manufacturing technologies and established an international market presence. Agarwal earned global recognition, including a place on Forbes' World's Billionaires list in 2024 *—PTI*

Knight Riders home base to host Olympic cricket: CEO

LOS ANGELES, 23 APRIL

ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta on Thursday termed the "ground breaking" of the cricket venue for the 2028 Olympics as the fulfilment of a long awaited "promise", noting that the facility, which also serves as the home ground of the Los Angeles Knight Riders, will bring the sport to the global showpiece.

"This is a moment in history because what we are breaking ground on today is not simply a cricket field. We are breaking ground on a promise. A promise that took 128 years to keep," Gupta said.

Gupta was speaking at the ground breaking ceremony of the venue for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.—*PTI*

India leads medal tally as Prachi clinches 3P rifle gold

CAIRO, 23 APRIL

India's Prachi Gaikwad struck gold in the women's 50m rifle 3-positions, while Naraen Pranav chipped in with a bronze in the men's 10m air rifle, as the country continued to dominate the medal standings at the ISSF Junior World Cup (Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun) here on Thursday.

This was India's second gold of the competition, following Shiva Narwal's triumph in the men's 10m air pistol on the opening day, taking the country's overall tally to nine medals including four silvers and three bronzes.—*PTI*

Thushara withdraws case against SLC over IPL NoC

COLOMBO, 23 APRIL

Fast bowler Nuwan Thushara, who had dragged Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) to court for not issuing him a No Objection Certificate (NoC) for competing in the IPL, on Thursday withdrew the case against the governing body.

The player, with 30 T20 international appearances since 2022, pleaded that the SLC had refused to issue him a NOC, saying that he had failed fitness tests. His attorney told the district court that since most of the games in the IPL have already been completed, his client wished to withdraw the case, which the court upheld. He apologized to the SLC and indicated his willingness to withdraw the case.—*PTI*

New players' union planned amid FIFPRO, FIFA dispute

NEW DELHI, 23 APRIL

A new international group representing football players launched on Thursday as a rival to the long-established global union FIFPRO, which has been in dispute with FIFA.

The Association of International Footballers (AIF) was founded in Madrid by David Aganzo, president of the new group that claims it will represent nearly 30,000 players.

Aganzo also leads the players' association in Spain (AFE) and was ousted as FIFPRO president in 2024.

Aganzo and other officials twice last year met with FIFA President Gianni Infantino in what was widely seen as a challenge by the world football body to Netherlands-based FIFPRO's mandate to represent players worldwide.

FIFA is the subject of a formal complaint made 18 months ago to the European Commission.—*PTI*

RCB, GT eye batting revival in their IPL match

Royal Challengers Bengaluru batters might do well to keep a Plan B in store

BENGALURU, 23 APRIL

Royal Challengers Bengaluru will be eyeing a batting resurgence against an equally stuttering Gujarat Titans in their Indian Premier League match here on Friday.

A slightly tacky Chinna swamy pitch squeezed the usual firepower out of the RCB batting unit against Delhi Capitals in their previous match, which they lost by six wickets. But more than the second defeat of the season, which was also a first at home in IPL 2026, squandering a chance to firm up their position inside the top four might disappoint RCB management.

Now, third on the table with eight points, they have Sunrisers Hyderabad (8 points), Delhi Capitals, and the Titans (6 points each) close on their tail. The reigning champions would very well know that another slip-up, this time against GT, would push them further into a tight spot, particularly because they are now bracing for a slew of away matches, including two at 'home away from home' Raipur.

So, the RCB batters might do well to keep a Plan B in store, as, at times, their all-out attack approach might not work. But one prerequisite for that is RCB batters' regaining their mojo and finding a way to put on board a challenging total even when conditions do not favour them.

Want RCB to play aggressively: Bobat

Royal Challengers Bengaluru director of cricket Mo Bobat underlined his team's resolve to maintain its aggressive brand of cricket in IPL 2026, and lauded skipper Rajat Patidar for fully imbibing the doctrine. Under Patidar, RCB had won their maiden IPL title last year, and have launched a strong campaign this year, winning four out of six matches to be perched on the third slot in the table.

"I want us to play aggressive cricket. I want us to be brave. Brave when those moments really require bravery. When the game is on the line, or things get a little bit difficult, if we're aggressive and brave through every phase, I think we'll play the way we want to play," said Bobat on the eve of the game against the Gujarat Titans.

In that context, Bobat said Patidar has stuck to the team's line of thinking while moving pieces on the field aggressively. —*PTI*

RR pacer Burger fined for breaching IPL code of conduct

Rajasthan Royals pacer Nandre Burger has been fined 10 percent of his match fees for breaching the IPL code of conduct during his team's match against Lucknow Super Giants here. The 30-year-old was also handed a demerit point, an IPL statement said on Thursday. "Nandre Burger, Bowler, Rajasthan Royals (RR) has been fined 10 percent of his match fees and has also accumulated One Demerit Point for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his team's match against Lucknow Super Giants (LSG)," the statement added. Burger was found to have breached the Article 2.5 of the IPL's code of conduct "about using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from another player in the Match."

Starc cleared by CA to play IPL, likely to play on 1 May

Mitchell Starc has been cleared by Cricket Australia to feature in the Indian Premier League with the pacer expected to be available for Delhi Capitals' match against Rajasthan Royals on 1 May. The left-arm quick has been sidelined since January due to elbow and shoulder niggles. He played a key role across all five Ashes Tests, earning the Player of the Series honour, before featuring in five Big Bash League games for Sydney Sixers later that month. "Starc is expected to build up his workloads on the ground in India and is on track to make his debut for the 2026 season in Delhi's May 1 match against Rajasthan Royals," Cricket.com.au reported. The 36-year-old's absence from the early phase of the IPL had sparked debate over the commitment of overseas players, prompting Starc to address the issue on social media and clarify what he termed "heavily misinformed opinions".

India's mistakes exposed at the right time before T20 WC: Kaur

JOHANNESBURG, 23 APRIL

Indian women's team captain Harmanpreet Kaur believes her side's below-par performance against South Africa has come at the right time, allowing the management sufficient time to address their shortcomings and "come back strong" for the T20 World Cup in June.

The 'Women in Blue' slumped to their first T20I series defeat since their group-stage exit at the T20 World Cup in October 2024, conceding a five-match rubber 0-3 to South Africa on Wednesday, with two matches still to be played.

Since that early exit at the ICC showpiece, Harmanpreet's side had enjoyed a strong run, winning series against West Indies, England, Sri Lanka and Australia.

"After the last T20 WC, we have won the maximum T20 series, this is the only one we didn't execute the way we were in the last series," Harmanpreet said at the press conference after the team's nine-wicket loss in the third WT20I here on Wednesday night.

"I think it's good that whatever mistakes we are making are now and not in the World Cup. This is the right time where we can learn and come back strong.

"As a captain I positively take everything. We still have two matches and we can still put up a decent show," she added.

With the T20 World Cup in England and Wales less than two months away, India's struggles, particularly with the ball, will be a concern.

While South Africa have claimed 21 Indian wickets in three matches, India have managed just seven scalps, with the visitors failing to make early inroads throughout the series.

In the third T20I, that inability proved costly as South Africa chased down India's 192 for 4 with remarkable ease in just 16.3 overs, registering a nine-wicket win. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

City leapfrog Arsenal in title race as Erling Haaland hits winner

LONDON, 23 APRIL

Erling Haaland's early goal fired Manchester City to the top of the Premier League with a 1-0 win at Burnley, which sent the Clarets back down to the Sky Bet Championship.

Haaland struck just five minutes in at a subdued Turf Moor as City ended Arsenal's 200-day reign at the top, but only on goals scored - any hopes City had of improving their goal difference were frustrated on a night when they both Rayan Cherki and Haaland hit a post.

Winning by a one-goal margin left City and Arsenal tied on both points (70) and goal difference (+37). City only leads courtesy of more goals scored (66 to Arsenal's 63).

"I was not frustrated, why would I be?" Guardiola said. "We won three points, we are top of the league."

Haaland and Rayan Cherki struck the goal frame and Nico O'Reilly had a weak shot saved with the net at his mercy as City's players threw everything at Burnley they finished the game having had 28 shots in an effort to rack up the goals.

"In these types of games, if you score the second or third that you deserve, everything's more fluid and natural," Guardiola said.

"But," he added, "the main target was winning the game."

City was nine points adrift of Arsenal after drawing with West Ham on March 14. Three straight wins, combined with back-to-back losses for Arsenal, has seen the title race turn on its head. —*PTI*

NAWAZ DENIES INTENTIONALLY USING BANNED SUBSTANCE: PCB

LAHORE, 23 APRIL

Experienced Pakistan all-rounder Muhammad Nawaz has submitted his response to the ICC and PCB following his positive dope test during the T20 World Cup co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka earlier this year, asserting that he did not intentionally consume the banned substance.

A source within the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Thursday that Nawaz has denied intentionally using any banned substance or recreational drugs.

"He has explained he had used some medicines for a health-related issue but didn't take any drugs," the source claimed.

Nawaz is under investigation by the ICC and the PCB for alleged use of recreational drugs during the World Cup, after returning a positive result in a random test conducted by the authorities.—*PTI*

USA to host Hungary in BJK Cup play-offs

CANBERRA, 23 APRIL

Record winners, the United States, will host Hungary, while France will welcome Australia in the Billie Jean King Cup play-offs set for November, tournament organisers said on Thursday.

The play-offs, featuring seven promoted teams from the regional Group I events and seven countries that lost in the 2026 qualifiers this month, will send the winners up to next year's qualifiers.

The US, who have won the title 18 times, failed to reach the finals after a shock loss to Belgium earlier this month, while seven-time champions Australia were defeated by Britain.

Hungary should include Anna Bondár, a BJK Cup regular who on Thursday at the Madrid Open, beat No. 7-ranked Elina Svitolina and became the first Hungarian woman to beat a top-10 player since Timea Babos beat Coco Vandeweghe in 2018Playoff winners advance to the 2027 qualifiers, while the losing teams will drop to regional events next year.

The other qualifiers for the finals, besides Belgium, are defending champion Italy, Britain, Kazakhstan, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine. Host nation China qualified automatically. —*PTI*

Bhullar goes bogey-free for T-6

SINGAPORE, 23 APRIL

Gaganjeet Bhullar's steady 4-under bogey-free round and Shiv Kapur's terrific hole-in-one were the major talking points of the opening day for the Indian contingent here at the Singapore Open on Thursday.

The USD 2 million International Series tournament saw Thailand's Ekpharit Wu and Japan's Jeongwoo Ham set the early pace during the first round, carding 7-under 64s at the par-71 Serapong course at Sentosa Golf Club. Wu shot a blemish-free round while Ham combined eight birdies with a lone bogey to lead by two strokes. Searching for his 11th win on the Asian Tour, Bhullar started from the 10th tee in a sedate manner with pars on his first eight holes. —*PTI*

INDIA'S LEADING JUNIOR TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES TO TEST THEIR SKILLS IN NATIONAL MEET

TUMKUR, 23 APRIL

The country's emerging track and field talents will be put to the test when the three-day National Junior (U20) Athletics Federation competition gets underway at the Mahatma Gandhi Stadium here on Friday, with many eyes on a future in India colours.

With an eye on next month's Asian U20 Athletics Championships in Hong Kong, the competition is expected to be intense, especially after the Athletics Federation of India announced stringent qualification standards for the continental meet, raising the stakes for young athletes eager to prove their credentials on the national stage.

The first medal events on day one will be the 5,000m races in both the men's and women's sections, but the spotlight will firmly be on the 100m sprint, where promising Jharkhand sprinter Parth Singh will test his mettle against Odisha's Pratik Maharana, among others.

Parth enjoyed an impressive season last year and will be keen to stamp his authority on the event, which has drawn a staggering 79 entries, while the men's 200m has attracted an equally crowded field of 93 competitors. —*PTI*

Priyanuj, Ritvik emerge U-19 and U-17 national champions

DEHRADUN, 23 APRIL

Assam's Priyanuj Bhattacharya staged a remarkable comeback to defeat Tamil Nadu's P. B. Abhinand in the Under-19 Boys' Singles final, denying his opponent a third gold at the Junior and Youth National Table Tennis Championships here on Thursday.

In a gripping summit clash that lived up to expectations, Abhinand surged to a commanding 2-0 lead, appearing firmly on course for the title.

However, Bhattacharya responded with grit and composure, turning the match around with four consecutive games. The Assam paddler shut the door on any comeback, sealing a 4-2 victory to finally claim a long-awaited national crown a fitting reward for his persistence.

The semifinals delivered a mix of grit and control, with Priyanuj surviving a dramatic seven-game battle against M.R. Balamurugan of Tamil Nadu, edging through 11-8, 11-5 before being pulled back to 2-3, then holding his nerve to close it out 14-12, 11-6 in the decider. —*PTI*

BWF THOMAS & UBER CUP FINALS

Indian men's team will aim to reclaim title

HORSENS, 23 APRIL

Banking on a settled core and bolstered by the rise of Ayush Shetty, the Indian men's team will aim to reclaim the title, while the women's side looks to punch above its weight at the BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals beginning here on Friday.

India will open their campaign against Canada on Friday, followed by matches against Australia on Monday (27 April) and China on Wednesday (29 April).

Four years ago, India did something unprecedented, annexing the Thomas Cup crown, considered the world team championship of badminton, putting the sport firmly on the radar of the youth in this country.

A bunch of bravehearts, led by Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy, defied all odds as they tamed Denmark, Malaysia and Indonesia en route to that epic moment in Indian badminton history.

That week witnessed Srikanth emerge as the invincible leader, Prannoy the decider specialist, and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty the gentle giants.

In the Uber Cup, the Indian women's team, led by double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, will face Denmark on Friday (24 April), Ukraine on Saturday (25 April), and China on Monday (27 April).

India has won bronze medals in the 2014 and 2016 editions, but it will be an uphill battle this time, especially without the services of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly, who is nursing an ankle injury. The women's team is clubbed with European Team Championships runners-up Denmark, bronze medallists Ukraine, and 16-time champions China. —*PTI*